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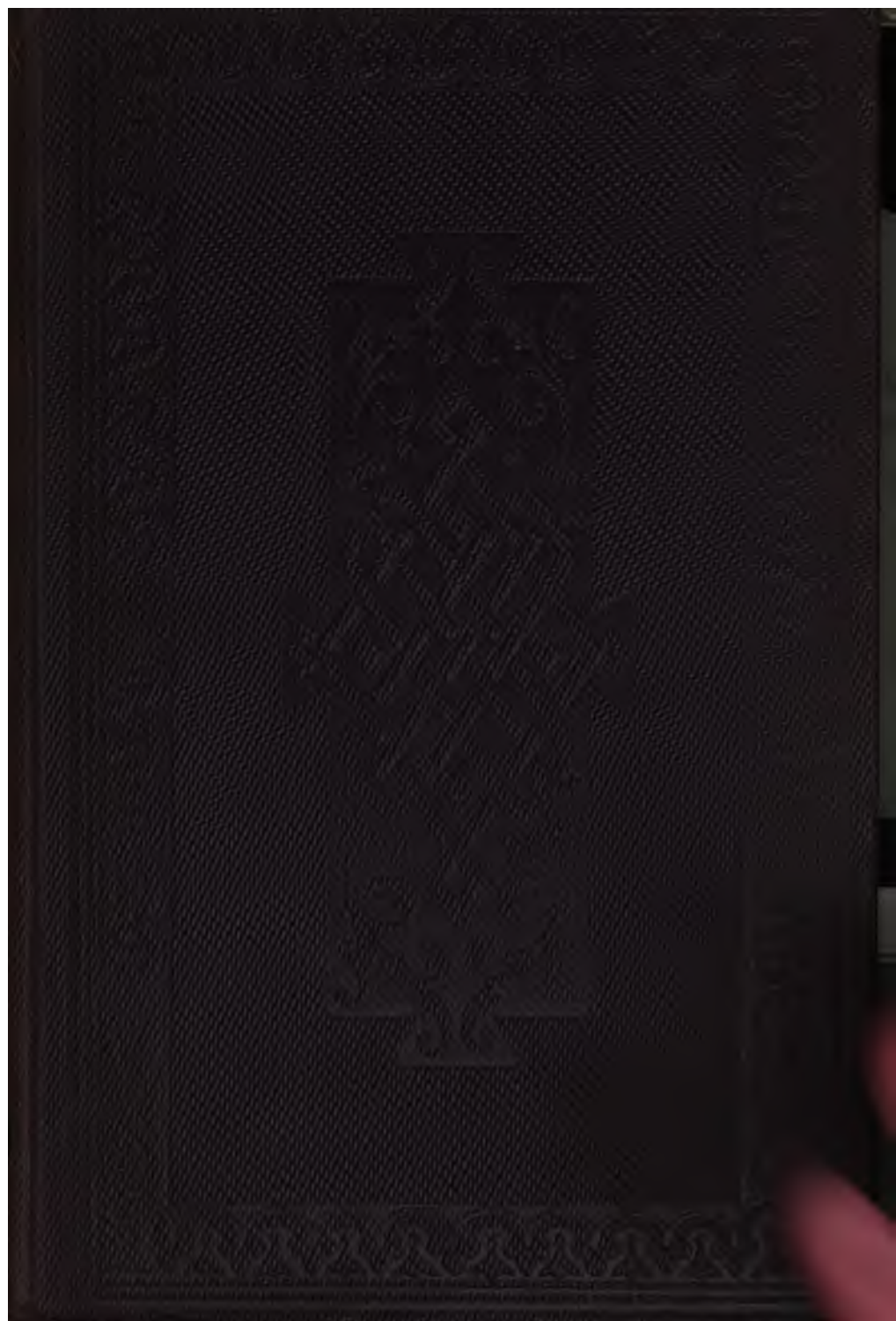
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GRANDMOTHER'S MONEY.

BY

THE AUTHOR OF

"ONE AND TWENTY," "WILDFLOWER,"

"WOODLEIGH,"

&c., &c.

"See what Money can do,"

BROME.

IN THREE VOLUMES.

VOL. III.

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BOOK IV.

CONTINUED.

“Husband! Wife!

There is some holy mystery in those names
That sure the unmarried cannot understand.”

BEAUMONT AND FLETCHER.

“Everye white will have its blacke,
And everye sweete its sowre;
This founde the ladye Christabelle
In an untimely howre.”

PERCY RELIQUES.

GRANDMOTHER'S MONEY.

CHAPTER V.

WAITING.

PREPARED, as I was the following day, for "toil and trouble," I did not anticipate a beginning of disturbances before the breakfast things were cleared away. Such was unfortunately the case, however, for George and I were considering the best method to meet the storm, and George the second was on the hearth-rug aggravating the kitten, when Mr. Bartholomew Tresdaile was announced.

That gentleman, whom I had not seen

since my marriage, came or rather fell into the room in a pitiable state of nervous agitation, his red hair brushed up the wrong way, the bow of his cravat at the back of his neck, and his shirt-collar nowhere at all. There was no ceremony about Bartholomew Tresdaile that morning—he did not shake hands with us, or ask if we were well. There was a doubling up of his frame when he reached the middle of the room, that might have been taken for a friendly greeting, or a violent collapse, as the fancy of the observer might incline. Dropping into the first vacant chair, he put his hat on the breakfast-table, took from it a silk pocket-handkerchief, and mopped his forehead carefully.

“Well, Bart. Tresdaile, how are you?” was George Keldon’s inquiry.

“Done up, sir,” was the reply; “the mind oppressed—diseased—weighed down. I’ll take a cup of coffee, if you please, without milk and sugar, Mrs. Keldon. Let it be as like the cup of bitterness as possible, then I can drink it to the dregs and enjoy it.”

Having drunk it to the dregs accordingly, he turned to me with a very earnest gaze.

"Mrs. Keldon, we have always been good friends — almost playfellows. You and I used to go arm-in-arm to church together at Hastings; sing our hymns together, side by side, like brother and sister—I can trust you. You were my poor grandmother's faithful friend, and have a claim on my respect and gratitude. Another cup, if you please—a little *bitterer* and more *grouts*!"

"Why, Bartholomew, you are not yourself to-day," remarked my husband.

"I wish I wasn't, sir," replied Bart.; "I wish I was somebody or something else, a crossing-sweeper with a happy 'art, a bird, a butterfly, anything but the victim of ingratitude and deceit! You can guess the cause of my mental disquietude, Mrs. Keldon?—it's all true, I suppose about this—this quarrel?"

To have seen Mr. Bart. Tresdaile's head fall on one side, and have met the sharp sidelong glance from Mr. Tresdaile's left

green eye, was to have no doubt of the gentleman being in full possession of his wits.

"Do you allude to the engagement between my brother and Miss Tresdaile?" I inquired.

"Yes—is it broken off?—are those sacred ties of affection severed between two gushing hearts?"

"I fear so."

"Only fear, my dear lady!" cried Bartholomew, running up in briskness several degrees; "is there *only* a fear that such may be the case? Isn't it all over—settled? Can this innocent couple still be saved from a life of unutterable woe—can I assist in the good work in any way?"

"I wouldn't have you deceive yourself, Bart.," said Keldon; "there is no chance of Alice Tresdaile becoming Mrs. Bloyce."

"Good Lord! is this really true, ma'am?" turning to me.

"Quite true."

"But she hasn't given him up yet?"

"Not yet. Miss Tresdaile meets Mr. Bloyce here to-night."

Mr. Bart. Tresdaile fell into a thinking fit. There was much that perplexed him, a great deal he did not understand.

"Is she sure to give him up?" he muttered, at last.

"She will assuredly give him up if he cannot explain his conduct in the past," I said.

"And as he cannot do that," added Keldon, "the thing is settled, Bart."

Bart. heaved a tremendous sigh.

"At what time in the evening are they likely to meet, now?"

"The time don't matter at all," Keldon hastened to reply; "we haven't any room—don't want anybody else—shan't hear anybody knock!"

"Oh! I couldn't do any good," said Bart., beginning to mop his forehead again; "but being a little interested in it—a very little, only eighteen thousand pounds at stake, that's all!—I thought if I waited in the street, or at the 'Jolly Sailors,' over the way, you could send the girl to say, 'it's all right, go home and be happy,' or, 'it's all wrong, go to the devil!'"

Bartholomew Tresdaile looked so truly miserable, that notwithstanding his mercenary motives, I could but pity him. Men who have a large fortune at stake, no matter on what venture, are pitiable objects—man is a gold-loving animal, and there is pain in the study of one who struggles hard to get rich. What friend of your acquaintance, reader, standing in the shoes, or rather in the big boots, of Mr. Bartholomew Tresdaile, would not have been as anxious to see the happy couple at the altar; would not have been as disturbed at the rending of all ties between them, as though his soul were bound up with the disruption?

And Bartholomew Tresdaile's soul was a narrow one, and bound up with that money; one could but pity his struggle against hope, and his grasp at the shadows.

"Look here, Bart.," said Keldon, relenting, "I dare say you feel this a great deal, but you must think that coming here to-night would do more harm than good."

"Yes, yes, Miss Tresdaile don't like me much," said Bart., between his teeth; "nor Ernest, nor even Bloyce, in his heart, for all his good words, the—ahem! Mr. Keldon, you were going to suggest something, I think?"

"Come to the door, or send a message this evening, and if I say 'Yes,' it's all a mistake, and they are better friends than ever; if I say 'No'—"

"It's a fall for me which upsets more than myself," said Bart., rising and putting on his hat. "Thank you, Keldon, for your kindness and your coffee—good-day."

He came back to say—

"You'll do your best, for your brother's sake, won't you, Mrs. Keldon?—it will be very serious for him!" and then dragged his way down the front garden with his hat on the back of his head, and the handkerchief hanging out beneath it, the picture of a limp and miserable man.

I was anxious to see Miss Hollingston that morning, but she neither called upon

me nor would allow an interview, although I went next door expressly for that purpose. She was ill, and would rather not be disturbed that morning — her love to Mrs. Keldon, and if she felt better in the afternoon she might look in for half-an-hour.

But before Miss Hollingston was better, Alice Tresdaile arrived. She came alone, and to all appearance in the best of spirits. Knowing her so well, even her first smiles deceived me, and hope took its place by my side again. Perhaps it was not so gloomy as I thought; for Alice, who should have been the first to suffer from the shock, seemed gay and light-hearted. Oh! there was a break in the clouds somewhere, and the light had drifted through and brightened the present!

But when we were side by side in the little front parlour,—she and I alone together, as in the old time when we were confidants,—the smiles vanished, and the fair countenance assumed a new expression. I had seen it once before, that dark,

unfeminine look of defiance—then I was its object, and she had stood on the landing-place in Stamford Street, and hurled down upon me her denunciations.

She dashed at once into the subject.

“Barbara, the old story has revived again. *He* is all that is cruel and designing—they would turn me against him, even at the last!”

Before I could reply, she said, almost doubtfully:—

“May I trust you, his sister, or is there not a friend to stand by me in this trial? No, not a trial,” she cried, hurriedly; “for were my faith already shaken, I should be unworthy of him.”

“You may trust me, Alice,” I replied; “no one hopes more earnestly than I that he is just and honourable.”

“But you *have* mistrusted him. Oh! Barbara, Barbara, you do not believe he can defend himself now—I see it written on your face!”

“I hope for the best, but I am prepared for the worst.”

"I would not be prepared for anything that casts a tarnish on his name," said Alice, proudly; "prepared to find him all that is selfish and—*unmerciful!*"

She paused before that last word and turned pale; it was the only word which told of her suffering and his cruelty in one. I have thought since that it was singular the expression of my doubts did not make her less my friend, or turn her from me as it had done before my marriage—was there a reluctance to have all the world against her now? But she would believe in him to the last—it is the nature of a true woman to cling to the frailest spar, let her know ever so well that it must go down in the deep sea. She condescended to reason with me; to prove the want of aim and object in the scheming attributed to her lover; to set against my doubts all the proofs of that attachment which he had shown since his engagement. I could but listen, and for the moment, overpowered by her earnestness, believe in Andrew's love for Alice; could, when she had finished, but

sit bewildered by the strange contrarieties presented by the story. He was the worst of cowards, the cleverest of actors, or the most injured of men. He had studied Alice deeply, too; he had even kept few secrets from her—she knew the life he was leading, and the speculations in which he was engaged.

“What is his fault but over-speculation?—gambling, if you will. Is my brother Ernest less a gambler because he seeks the Stock Exchange in lieu of the race-course? Does he not gain money by other people's losses the same as Andrew Bloyce? Andrew's pursuits require more caution, but they are equally as honourable.”

“Oh! Alice, Alice, is the career of a betting man worthy your defence?”

“I defend it from the charge of dishonesty, but I do not admire it, Barbara,” she replied; “it is a grave accusation of Miss Hollingston's, that Andrew ruined her father, when it was her father's fault to speculate too rashly. No, I do not admire this struggle for money on the race-course; I have told him so, and he has made such

promises! On our wedding-day," she added, blushing, "he closes his betting-book for ever!"

She had forgotten the duty which had led her to my house, and was whispering of her wedding-day! The rapid current of thought had drifted her from a grim Present to an unattainable Future.

Alice would not go back to that Present either; she would look beyond it and see happiness and light in the meteors that flashed over the waste. It was her nature to trust—and though the blow might fall heavier for it, she would keep her faith in the idol till it broke at her feet. And how hard she did try that day to believe!—how sanguine she was of the result, and how deaf to all counsel of mine to look at the picture as it might be, and think how she should act if *that* were the landscape! She had bent her mind to one end, and from that her thoughts would not outwardly swerve. Firm and unyielding, she stood on the rock of her faith, watching the play of the waves as they dashed nearer and

nearer, hoping on to the last that the waters would calm, and dead to the thought that they might wash her away !

"I thought once, Barbara, what a show it was making of him to lure him hither," she said ; "and my own pride revolted against those explanations which concerned me so deeply ; but I thought, too, what a triumph it would be to prove all your suspicions false, and end them for ever."

"Have you reason to doubt Miss Hollingston's sincerity, Alice?" I asked ; "it is a cruel thing to hope some unworthy motive may have actuated her, but I am Andrew's sister !"

"I cannot understand the Miss Hollingston of Kingsland Road," said Alice, coldly ; "she assumes the heroine, and she was no heroine when we were friends and spoke of our eternal love. Like the snake," she added, "she has changed her skin more than once."

They were bitter words, but let one woman interfere with another's sweetheart, and see how bitterly the one interfered with

can speak. There are no gall and wormwood to equal it!

"At school she was vain, frivolous, fond of admiration; turned half the girls' heads with talk of her boy lovers at home," continued Alice; "at Hastings, where I met her again, she was as variable as the wind—at one time cold, worldly and prudent, at another sentimental, romantic and pensive. I meet her for the third time, and lo! she is the injured woman, the model creature of the last new novel, who steps forward to save her friend from the snare at the cost of her own reputation!"

"You are severe, Alice," I replied; "more, I don't think you are just to Miss Hollingston. Mistaken or not in her conjectures—('and can she be mistaken?' my heart whispered)—if she act with the best motives, it is common courtesy to be grateful."

"Grateful to her who would harm me against my future husband!" cried Alice, indignantly; "who would separate me from him, in order to catch him herself, perhaps!

Is love for me, or spite against Andrew, the ruling agent in this matter? I asked her *that* question—I could not listen to her slanders or hear her letters read, and I dared her to come here to-night, if her desire to save me were a generous one. But she will not come, Barbara—she will not come!”

She looked eagerly towards me, as if for confirmation of her assertion—waited very eagerly for my reply.

“And if she come not?” I answered, evasively.

“I will say to Andrew—‘since we met last, much has been said that reflects against your truth and honour, but she who has set afloat those suspicions stands not here to prove them facts, and I believe in you with all my heart!’”

“But will you not ask him—”

“Nothing!” cried Alice, proudly; “I degrade but myself in taking the part of the slanderer.”

Alice’s enthusiasm almost carried me away again; to hear her words, to see her trust, was to believe for the moment—ah, only

for the moment!—that Andrew Bloyce was the best and the bravest of men!

She spoke of Andrew, and her faith in him, till Keldon's entrance checked her enthusiasm, and outwardly gave a turn to her thoughts. I say *outwardly*, for over our early tea, and before every minute of the night was loaded with anxiety, I could read her effort at attention. And when the night came, and the gas was lighted, she drew her chair nearer the fire and gave up the struggle. She would take no further part in our conversation, try as we might to draw her into channels that diverged from the great fact at hand. She would turn round and smile, even laugh, at some casual remark of Keldon's, to show how unconcerned she was, but she would not trust herself to answer a word.

I fancied once or twice, as I stole a glance towards her, that the face was becoming pale, and that the youthful form shivered as with internal cold; but it might have been my own nervous delusions, for when the clock was striking eight, I was

pale enough, and my knees were knocking together under the table in a most undignified manner.

Keldon was concerned for us both; for me in particular, selfish man that he was, for he went through a variety of dumb motions and facial distortions, pointing upstairs, at Alice and at me, in a way that was perfectly incomprehensible.

I had spent a quarter of an hour in silence watching George's pantomimic actions, when he burst out with:—

"Why don't you bring the baby down? Miss Alice would like to see the baby, and it'll occupy you a bit, perhaps."

"Baby's asleep, dear."

"You can't know that sitting there, and perhaps the cat in the cradle, or the cradle too near the fire—how those last coals fly out of the grate, to be sure!"

But George's *ruse* was too transparent, and when I looked at him steadily he quite blushed at his poor attempt at deception.

"Well, the long and short of it is,

that this is too much like a funeral to please me! Can't you say anything to Miss Tresdaile?"

"Oh! I don't want to talk, please," cried Alice; "I'm not nervous, or—or—fearful; I only want to think!"

"Thinking's a bad look-out, cousin Alice," returned Keldon; "and as you have been thinking too much already, Barbara will—"

A knock at the door, that made the three of us jump. My strong, stalwart husband was as timid as myself that night; the long silence, the waiting for the something to come, had disturbed his nerves and consequently affected his temper. He was put out for being nervous at all, and when he caught himself jumping in the chair like a startled woman, he swore audibly at his folly.

There were three anxious faces turned towards Ernest Tresdaile, as he entered and looked sharply round the room.

"Good evening to you all!" said he. "Well Alice my dear girl, we shall

have a wintry ride home—it's snowing very fast."

"Is it?" she answered, languidly.

"I hope Mr. Bloyce will not disappoint us," said he, seating himself before the fire, and crossing one knee over the other; "all things considered, I don't think it's likely he will disappoint us."

"He never breaks his word," said Alice, firmly.

"A good trait in a man's character," replied Ernest, evasively; "well, Keldon, how gets on the Decorticator?"

"Half-past nine."

"Eh?"

"Oh! the Decorticator—a day or two will finish it, and then I shall find out whether it's to astonish the town millers or not."

"You'll patent it, of course?"

"Yes."

Whilst Ernest was speaking, he was drawing several papers from his pocket, sorting them, and placing them on the table in a business-like manner that gra-

dually drew our attention towards him.

"What have you got there, Ernest?" Alice said at last, in a peculiar tone.

"Merely little memoranda, my dear Alice, taken from time to time; fragments of dialogue, &c., that may be useful to repeat to-night—notes on events that have passed, and so on."

"Evidence against Mr. Bloyce?"


"For and against, Alice dear—nothing alarming."

"Put them away, sir, put them away!" cried Alice; "Mr. Ernest Tresdaile is not the counsel for the prosecution—neither is Mr. Bloyce upon his trial."

"Certainly not, my dear," replied Ernest; "but he may assert something to-night which these documents—his own words—may disprove. He—"

"He will say nothing," interrupted Alice, warmly, "if there be no accuser."

"But you will never let this opportunity pass?" cried Ernest; "Mr. Bloyce has a right to defend himself, and will be proud to answer *any* question."



"No," said Alice, firmly.

"There has been a doubt cast on him," said Ernest, firmly too, "and no one shall marry my sister who is not above suspicion, or who fears an explanation."

"No one has a right to insult him by questioning his honesty."

Ernest shrugged his shoulders and looked across at Keldon, then turned to his sister, and laid his sunburnt hand upon her shoulder.

"Alice, my dear girl," said he, very gently, "this is not the spirit to meet the trial in store for you. This savours too much of confidence in one who has played the traitor from the hour of his engagement. Don't shrink, Alice—better hear my words, now, than believe rashly in the false to the last moment."

"I have not lost my hope in him one instant, Ernest," said she; "it is cruel of you," in a faltering voice, "to prejudice him in this manner. It is not fair," she cried, in an exalted voice, "to him or me!"

"Well, we will wait."

And leaning back in his chair, he took his chin in his hand after his old fashion. Not long to accuse or defend, to prejudge or to wait, for we were hardly silent again, and the clock on the mantelpiece had scarcely begun to be noticed for its noisy tick-tick, when a loud rapid knocking rose the echoes, and set all on the alert.

Alice sprang from her chair.

"I will go to him—I will be the first to welcome him—to tell him I have not changed in word or thought."

"Stop, Alice!" entreated Ernest.

But Alice had pushed aside her brother's hands and hurried to the door—had opened it, and gone into the narrow passage. A moment afterwards they came into the room together—my brother and she—he looking pale and haggard, and his eyes very dark and large; Alice on his arm trusting to the last. At the same instant came another summons from the wintry street without!

CHAPTER VI.

BROUGHT TO BAY.

ANDREW BLOYCE stopped in the middle of the room and regarded us attentively, waiting, as it were, for the first word. There was nothing unusual in the scene; the brother of his betrothed and the husband of his sister had sat thus before. Was it our sad anxious faces, then, that were the warning to him, or was it the trembling hands upon his arm!

"You are late, Mr. Bloyce," said Ernest, at last.

"Yes—late," he echoed.

The papers on the table caught his eye,

and he winced a little. He did not know they were papers which he had never seen or put a pen to—mere notes of Ernest's on past evenings spent together, fragments of a hastily written diary, &c. — and their appearance troubled him. He knew that they lay there witnesses against his honesty of purpose, and the very uncertainty of the shape they might assume kept him defenceless. I have already said he came in looking pale and haggard; now, as he stood there in the full light of the little gas chandelier, he was to me like the ghost of his former self. There was no expression of anger or defiance on his face—neither, on the contrary, was there fear or dismay. There was something like sorrow, even like contrition—a shade, as it were, too, of embarrassment at his peculiar position, nothing more. He could guess something from the past had started in his path — could in his heart guess *what*, perhaps—and he waited for it silently.

It was Alice who was restless, irritable, eager to clear away the mist from the eyes

of those who had been deceived in *him*! She saw at once that the explanation must come with or without Miss Hollingston; the reception of her lover was too strange a one to pass unnoticed. She had heard the summons at the door immediately following that of her lover's, and was waiting impatiently for the entrance of another—of her who had brought to pass this trouble.

“Andrew,” she said, in a low voice, and speaking very rapidly, “it requires no great powers of discernment to see that something has happened since we saw you last, that something has been said against you which distresses your friends a great deal, and pains me more. We all of us, dear,” continued she, pressing his arm with her linked hands, and looking up into his face, “have to endure some such ordeal in our lives—to be distrusted by the best of friends, and have assigned to motives the most honourable, designs the most unworthy; but we all of us, too, Andrew,” how hopefully she uttered those words! “have the power to refute the slander, and cast back

the shame on those who have aspersed us."

Andrew Bloyce did not meet the earnest upturned eyes; he turned his head away from her, and looked upon the carpet.

"You will not let your pride keep back your answer, Andrew?" she implored; "you will not for *my* sake, believe that those who mistrust you are undeserving of your explanations. For the sake of one who would see the whole world with her confidence."

He shivered, and kept the same position, the same silence.

"Andrew, don't you hear me?"

"What do they say against me?" he asked at last, in a hoarse voice.

"There is only one accuser — she has just arrived, I think, and is summoning courage to brave out her cruel part."

"She—*she*!"

The whole face changed now, the flush of shame mounted thereto, and the nervous hand twitched at the long brown moustache.

"Look here, Bloyce," said Keldon, suddenly, "there is little for you to explain if all's true—there is in my opinion only one who has a right to explanation if it's a lie, and there she stands beside you. But if it's all true, mind, there is no evading it!"

Keldon left the room, returned immediately, and opened wide the door.

"Miss Hollingston!" he announced.

Andrew Bloyce drew the chair that had been placed for him nearer the table, sat down and leaned his head upon his hand. He sat there very still, looking neither to the right nor left. Once, as Alice, still standing by his side, rested her hand lightly on his shoulder, he shrank a little as though an iron had seared him.

Alice, whose face had become very white, stooped and whispered :—

"You do not fear, Andrew?"

"A better time might have been chosen for this mockery—a place more fitting," he answered; "I am tired—ill—not myself!"

"Shall I go away?"

"No," he answered, quickly; "don't go, yet!"

George Keldon had placed a chair for Miss Hollingston, but she was standing by it still, her gloved-hand resting on the back. In her dark garments, with the veil flung back from her cold stern face, she looked well the Nemesis of that night.

"Has Miss Tresdaile anything to ask me?"

"Nothing!" said Alice, in reply.

"Miss Tresdaile mistrusted my intentions yesterday; has she greater faith in me now I have sacrificed my pride to her?"

"Her faith in you, destroys her faith for ever in another—is that your wish, Miss Hollingston?"

"For your own sake—yes!"

"For my sake, then, say what you have to say before him!"

Alice drew a long breath, and looked towards me for an instant. It was a strange imploring look, seeking a smile of comfort to reassure her sinking heart. For it was sinking then; the dull impassive attitude of him she loved kept adding to its weight!

"Mr. Bloyce," said Miss Hollingston, advancing; "you know my story; is there reason to repeat it? It is already known to Miss Tresdaile and her brother, will you spare me the repetition of your abuse of trust?—of your attempt to win me in the days gone by, when I was moving in a higher sphere than yours?—will you own this to Miss Tresdaile?"

"A boyish folly—I acknowledge it!"

"Will you acknowledge when that folly ceased, and something deserving of a harsher name succeeded?" said Miss Hollingston; "when we met again in Hastings, and another heiress raised ambitious dreams? Will you acknowledge the scheming that succeeded, the part you played with my father, me and Alice Tresdaile deceiving each in turn—or will you leave to me the task to shame you?"

Andrew passed his hand across his forehead in a dreamy vacant manner; the only sign of the effect made upon him by his accuser's words. He sat there, in the same attitude he had at first assumed, looking

down upon the table, passive, gloomy—so unlike himself, that I felt an icy coldness stealing through my veins.

A long silence—waiting for the answer that was never made.

“Will you not end this painful scene at once, sir?” cried Miss Hollingston, indignantly; “do not your own selfish considerations prompt you to the better course? You spare yourself the dissection of a cunning scheme—you spare the girl who has believed and trusted in you!”

“I am not well—trouble on all sides surrounds me—I cannot bear it!” he murmured, in a stifled tone.

“The troubles are of your own making, sir,” said Miss Hollingston; “and there is no evading them.”

He looked up at last—he sat back in his chair with glowing face and flashing eyes.

“What do you wish me to say, Miss Hollingston?”

“The truth.”

“There is no unravelling it!” he cried;

"it is mixed up with so much that is bad, and with so much more that is excusable, yet false; it is hard to say the whole truth, and not explain the whole chain which has crossed and recrossed my path, wound round my limbs and kept me to the earth. I would say all," he cried, more passionately, "if I could spare this poor girl so awful a confession. I have been anxious to say all so long and rescue her, and day by day I have put off the time and let the chain grow heavier, until I have lost all heart, and hope, and honour!"

The hand of Alice left the shoulder of her lover and dropped heavily to her side—the last ray died out of the sad eyes, and over the whole countenance spread the shadow of despair. Andrew saw the change, and turned rapidly towards her.

"But, Alice, I was not so bad—God and my own conscience bear me witness," he cried; "I was not so very bad! Temptation in my path, a hope to save myself from ruin, a chance to make a better name, I own them all, Alice, but—I loved you!"

Let it stand now the greatest proof of love that I make no defence—that I resign you, and save you from myself !”

“You assume the part of a deliverer too readily,” said Alice, between her ashen lips.

“Right—right !” groaned Andrew ; “and your deliverance has come from other hands ! If I had had the courage—oh ! if I had only had the courage months ago to break the chain myself, and do one honest action, I should not have fallen to a depth so low and black as this !”

“I might have pitied the weakness of your nature then, sir,” said Alice ; “now—”

“Now ?” repeated Andrew.

“Now I despise your cowardice, your baseness. Miss Hollingston,” turning to her, “I have been unjust to you, forgive the folly that has blinded me so long !—I am very young, and it is always hard to believe ill of those to whom we have promised everything !”

Miss Hollingston wrung the hands in hers long and silently, keeping her head averted from her friend. That friend, still so outwardly calm, exhibiting so much of quiet

dignity beneath the blow that had fallen on her youth, turned to me.

"This is a trial to you, Barbara, as well," she said; "will last longer than my own, for there is no sundering the tie that binds you to him. I have to ask you to forgive me, too, for mistrusting you in that past wherein you judged so truly, and I so like a foolish girl! God bless you—I don't know if I shall ever see you again—good-bye!"

She stooped and kissed me long and tenderly. Whilst her face was close to mine, I could see the eyes were full of tears, feel the nervous quivering of the lips upon my cheek. She had borne her trial well—but the first blow was heavy, and she had had such hopes! I would have had her leave us calm and grave, with all the sorrow at her heart pressed down and hidden—left for the secret chamber and the watch of her Maker. But she had borne too much already, and had never been too strong. She gave way suddenly, and broke into a passionate torrent of tears that startled all of us from our seeming apathy.

She flew from my arms to her brother's.

"Oh! take me home—oh! take me home!"

There was a struggle in the heart of Andrew Bloyce—his hands clenched and unclenched spasmodically, his chest heaved like a woman's. Another moment, and he was at her feet.

"Alice!"

"Keep back, sir," thundered Ernest, for the first time truly roused; "your part of shame is ended, and touch her if you dare in my presence! See what you have made of her, and be satisfied your coward's work is finished!"

Andrew rose, glared at Ernest, went back to his chair, dropped his arms on the table, and buried his head in them.

"Will you take me home, Ernest, dear—I shall be so much better, *happier* at home!"

They went out together, brother and sister, and I followed with Ernest Tresdaile's papers. Ernest and Alice remained in the passage, whilst I hurried upstairs, and gathered Alice's things together. As I rejoined them

I heard Ernest saying—"All happens for the best, Alice, dear. You will soon forget this folly, and fancy it a leaf out of some romantic story."

"Yes," with a sigh, "it is so easy to forget!"

When the street door was opened, the snow and sleet came drifting fast into the passage, like a welcome from the world at large. Bending their heads low, to avoid the full effects of the storm, they went away together—he watchful of her every step, and guiding her through the snow to the Brougham waiting in the roadway. A moment more, the carriage door was slammed and they were engulfed by the night, which in its darkness, and its stormy wildness, seemed the fitting emblem of Alice's own thoughts.

A hand upon my arm, as I stood there thinking.

"Do you want to catch cold, Barbara, my lass," said Keldon in my ear; "what is the good of crying here, and getting over snow. Just think a little of the baby!"

"Have you left Miss Hollingston with Andrew?"

"Yes—she wished it. Shut the door."

I was about to comply, when some one came rushing up the front garden—an undistinguishable, high-shouldered some one, heaped thick with snow.

"It's a fact then, Keldon?" was the breathless query.

"Yes, Bart."

"It's all over for ever!"

"For ever, not a doubt of it."

"So be it, and damn it!" growled Bart., turning round, rushing back again, and banging the iron gate after him, with pantomimic celerity. I was closing the door for the second time, when Miss Hollingston came from the parlour towards us.

"This has been a night of trial to each of us," she said, "to him, perhaps, the most severe. I have been telling him, Mr. Keldon, that my motive for interference was for Alice Tresdaile's sake alone."

"What does he reply?" I asked.

"He retains the same despairing posture;

will not look up, or speak—weak of will, in this, as in all else, every action of his life is more or less a torture.”

Miss Hollingston left us, and we returned to the parlour to find Andrew as we had left him, his arms folded on the table, his head between them, his whole attitude one of complete prostration.

“Come, Bloyce,” said Keldon, bluntly, “we have had enough of this playing the girl, for one night. *You* have not been injured in heart or mind, *you* haven’t been hardly dealt by—there, get up, and go home!”

Andrew rose mechanically.

“You will not care to see me here again, Keldon,” said he; “I’m not fit for an honest man’s society. I’ve acted the fool and the knave; I have made my love for Alice matter for bargain; I’ve been a scamp and a money-grubber—I won’t come here again!”

“If you can’t excuse your fault in any way, Bloyce,” cried Keldon—“if you feel a cringing, sneaking thing, something less than a man—if you feel you would give

your right arm, your life, to cancel the history of the last three years—why, come!”

“I have no excuse—I have no manly courage, though I would die to-night to make her reparation, if dying so could do it. But I shall not see either of you again; I’m not brave enough to face the truth. I’m the coward I ever was, and I’m not worthy of a thought!”

“Think like that a week or two, and it will do you good, old fellow.”

“It will drive me mad!” was the hollow response.

“Oh! Andrew!” I cried, “don’t seek in the excitement of the old, bad life to forget the evil which that life engendered. Do try once more to be true and honest to yourself! In your repentance, dear, there is such hope of better things; but in your recklessness, such fear that the last chance you may ever have will melt away in darkness.”

“Barbara, there is no chance for me,” he cried; “you do not know how Fate hems me in on every side, and how escape

from it is impossible. I might have burst free by the ruin, body and soul, of that young girl, and I should have done it in despair, and sacrificed her by the name of wife, if angels had not guarded her. I shall sink to the lowest depths now, thanking God I drag no one down with me."

"Oh! be thankful for something more than that — be hopeful of the days to come!"

"No, no."

He struck his hand vehemently upon the table; he looked at me with his dark, despairing face—he would see no days to come more bright than this!

"Good-bye, Barbara," he said, in a sadder tone; "I have been a bad brother to you. You are well quit of me."

"Will you stay here till the morning, Andrew?" I entreated; "you are ill—you look ill. It is so wild a night!"

"Good-bye," he repeated.

"We want to talk of this more calmly, Andrew," I said; "when shall we see you again?"

"I don't know!" was the moody answer.

He did not take me in his arms, or kiss me; he shrank back from any evidence of affection that night of his humiliation. He moved towards the door with eyes bent downward, with furrowed brow, with both hands clenched. He was going into the street bare-headed, when Keldon gave him his hat, which he took without a word. As his hand touched Keldon's accidentally, my husband started.

"Why, you are like a hot coal!—better stop to-night, Bloyce."

He murmured something unintelligible, and went out into the snow.

"I must see him a little way," whispered George to me; "where's my great-coat, Barbara?"

The great-coat was procured, and as he struggled hastily into it I whispered:—

"Don't leave him till he is safe at home, George—do your best to cheer him."

"All right," he answered; "I'll take the

key with me, Barbara—you understand?"

His significant look meant go to bed and get some rest after the fatigue of the day, and I nodded my head as if I meant to do it. But when they were gone, I piled the grate with coals and sat down before the fire to await his return—as if I could have gone to bed like a stoical Penelope, with the knowledge that he was out and away from me! And I had so much to think about too, and to cry over—it is always a sad thought, the disruption of an engagement began with hope and vain dreaming—and the figures of that restless day came flitting in, and subsiding into their old places—the chairs were waiting for them!—and all was acted again, till my head and my heart ached.

Fortunately for me the baby awoke and would not be pacified by the very small nursemaid who appertained to our establishment.

The baby was brought downstairs; the cradle followed in due course; the very small nursemaid and the under-sized ser-

vant girl went to bed, and I sat up waiting for George the first, and nursing his heir and successor.

It is a dreary fidgety time to the most patient of us women, that sitting up for the loved one ; waiting, watching with the book that cannot be read in our hands, and the clock that is so very noisy, ticking monotonously on the landing. Under the best circumstances it is depressing to the spirits ; the small hours of the morning drag on their way wearily, and the footsteps like unto his keep passing the door and dying away in the distance, and the cab that should bring him home rolls by the house and makes our heart sink !

He was very long in coming home ; I had reckoned the distance, calculated the time, and the hour had passed for his return, and no George. Nothing could have happened to Andrew so long as George was with him, and there had been plenty of time even to walk to Pimlico, supposing such economy necessary. If anything *had* happened, if—thank God, the latch-key rattling in the

door, and the well-known tread in the passage at last!

As he came into the room, he said:—

“There, that’s like you—I knew you’d be sitting up till you were more like a ghost than a human being.”

“How late you are, George!”

“Yes—it is late.”

“And Andrew—how did you leave Andrew?”

“Not very lively, but better, I think,” he answered; “come, Barbara, let’s be off upstairs!”

“Oh! George, there is something more behind—I am sure there is!—you can’t disguise it from me!”

“Well, there is a little, but don’t look so scared,” said Keldon; “how precious quick you women are when nobody wants you! Nothing more has happened to Andrew than happens every day to men better than he—he’s arrested.”

“Arrested!”

“Yes—for debt at the suit of Bartholomew Tresdaile, Esq.”

CHAPTER VII.

“IN DIFFICULTIES.”

ARRESTED for debt ! Phrase of multiform significance, piercing in one heart like an arrow, and falling on another's like a snow flake ; desolating one home and leaving within it the sense of despair, causing in another but a jest at one's ill luck and ill-natured friends. There are some men to whom misfortune is a wreck, as there are others to whom it is a trade ; one sinks at the blow and feels the hand of a bailiff like the touch of a Calcraft ; another goes smiling to the Bench, and, meaning to “make something out of it,” is as happy within the

high walls as if he had never known liberty.

My brother Andrew did not take readily to his incarceration, for he had not been prepared for the blow. Reckless as his career had been, and heavy as were his debts, he had looked forward to his share of Alice's legacy as a means of escape always open; the present had been sufficient for him, and he had enjoyed it like a sensualist—seen the world, speculated, lost, and borrowed as though there were no such thing as “a rainy day” to prepare for. And misfortune had not come alone in his case—losses on the turf had been followed by the loss of the heiress, and the heiress by the loss of his freedom. It was the first great check to his career; fortune had smiled and fortune had frowned on his betting-book, but he had gone on hoping for better times till the last!

There was one more loss for which he was equally unprepared, though day after day gave its signal—the loss of his health. He had been unwell the night of the revelation; the unwholesome air of a lock-up in

Chancery Lane had not improved him, and when Chancery Lane was changed to Whitecross Street Prison, his health began rapidly to decline. When George and I went to see him in that last Asylum for broken-down honesty and industrious knavery, his appearance startled us both. The thin sallow face, the shadows under the eyes, the eyes so preternaturally bright, the hand that could not rest a moment, but wandered to his neckerchief, his lips, his moustache, or through his long fair hair, were all evidences of failing strength, of loss of nerve, of fever.

He was not glad to see us; did not thank us for the few things we had brought, or the books we laid before him. When we asked what we could do to help him, or whether there were any commissions in the outer world we could fulfil for him, he answered "No;" and when Keldon offered him the use of his purse for his present necessities, he frowned and turned away.

"May I ask, what you think of doing?" asked Keldon.

"Nothing!"

"You have got in a mess, don't you mean to get out of it?"

"No," he answered; "I'm as well here as anywhere else."

"I have heard there are many ways of getting out of a fix like this," said my husband; "Insolvent Courts, and so on."

"My case will not bear a public examination," replied Andrew; "it's a black affair altogether, and I'd rather die than face a judge. There is not a question I could answer without a blush, or—a lie; without dragging into the light a name that should be sacred as the dead. Leave me here, I have been pestered enough by pettifoggers to-day, and I can't bear argument—I hate," he added, peevishly, "to hear the sound of a man's voice."

"But your creditors?" I asked.

"I don't want to talk of them?"

"What is the amount of the debt incurred with Mr. Bartholomew Tresdaile?"

"More than ever I can pay," he cried; "it was drawn on account of the sum I was

to have to marry Alice—accursed blood-money, which Fate avenges by imprisoning me for squandering. I am justly served—I don't regret my position—I only care to change it for a coffin!”

“Well, you are uncommonly lively in your notions,” observed Keldon; “and as we do not appear to cheer you up much, we'll wish you a good-day.”

“Good-day.”

As we were leaving him, he called me by my Christian name and said:—

“Don't come again—it drives me mad, girl. I would rather be left to myself.”

“You are so excited—will you not see a doctor?”

“I'm well enough.”

He seemed to hesitate, and I said:—

“Have you anything to say to me, Andrew, dear?”

“Yes—to ask something.”

“Well!”

“Does *she* know of this?”

“No!”

“Don't see her—if you should by chance

meet her, don't tell her! It can do no good, it may lead to explanations most humiliating. Barbara, there is something for even me to be thankful for—she did not know that I was bribed to marry her!”

I did not tell him that her brother Ernest was aware of the compact between him and Bart. Tresdaile;—he was already suffering from an excitement that kept my fears on the alert.

“And there are two more who must not hear of this—this shame,” he said, quickly; “who must think I am well and getting on in the world. Poor old couple, they at least can be kept in happy ignorance of the villain I have been.”

“You mean father and mother?”

“Yes,” was the moody answer.

“Oh! I am so glad you think of them a little; remember their pride in you, their old prophecies of what a great man you would be when you were at work in the world. It is something to find you have not quite forgotten them.”

“My father, he is one of my creditors,

too," moaned Andrew, covering his face with his hands; "God keep him in ignorance of the bad son and brother I am—if he could only die believing in me to the last! Barbara, surely it will be easy to deceive them in Jersey," he said, eagerly; "keep their hearts full of faith and love in me—if some one could only think me good!"

This despairing cry brought the tears upon my cheeks; it showed the struggle within him, the craving of the better nature not be wholly shut out from love of kindred, friends.

It must be an awful thing to stand alone in our baseness!—to know that every friend of the past shuns the touch of our hand!

I went home very low-spirited. Andrew's excitement, nervous prostration, and the ignominious position to which he was reduced, all troubled me, and Keldon's kind words failed to arouse me. The figure of my brother seemed to stand ever before me as I had seen it last, with

the thin hands covering the face, and the whole form tremulous beneath the shock of remorse. I knew what confinement in a debtor's prison would be to him; with fresh air to inhale, and everything of the best to indulge in, he had been never the strongest of men; now he must succumb, slowly and surely. I did not take Andrew at his word and keep away from Whitecross Street; I was too concerned about his health, his recklessness as to his future, not to see him frequently; hoping at each visit to find him with better looks and brighter thoughts, and finding in every day a change—but not the change wished and prayed for at my bedside!

There was no time left to think of Alice; one hurried note to assure her of my sympathy, my wishes for her future happiness, was written to Stamford Street, and was replied to by Ernest from Devonshire. He and his sister were staying in that county for a few weeks; Alice was not well—not well enough to write even—he thought a change would do her good

and strengthen her — he trusted to see me at Stamford Street on their return, and that recent events would not diminish the affection between Alice and myself. He was sure, too, that Alice's indisposition was but transitory, and that she would soon forget its cause; she had a brave heart, he added, and the knowledge of how she had been betrayed would soon enable her to treat the past as a dream.

How she had been betrayed! I thought at that time, with my heart yearning for Andrew, I might have been spared the cruel allusion to that night; and yet he was with a sister, ill and suffering, too.

I suppose at this time my grief for Andrew, and my efforts to keep that grief to myself, made some inroads on my own looks.

"You are fretting about that chap, Barbara," said Keldon, one morning in the new year, when the Decorticator was finished, and we were inspecting the model; "that won't do, you know!"

"Can I help it?"

"It must be helped, somehow," he replied decisively; "it won't do to see you looking ill at the very time the sun is brightening for us?"

"Will it be time to be gay when the sun shines on a brother's grave, George?"

"Eh! what!—is he so very ill, then?"

"He changes every day—with no hope in our hearts we soon sink!"

George paid a visit to Whitecross Street that day, returned, went into his study and gave a few extra touches to his model, but said nothing concerning his interview with Andrew. The next day I received a letter from my dear father, full of startling news!

"George," said I; "father is coming to see us—to spend a week with us! Oh! what is to be done about Andrew?"

"What would you advise?" asked George, with a peculiar look at me over his breakfast-cup.

"I can't advise—can't suggest," said I, wringing my hands; "how is it that you,

so full of clever ideas, don't seem to think or care about a way to save my brother?"

I was sorry when the words were uttered, his honest face wore an expression of such pain.

"I have never owned to not caring for your brother, Barbara," was the reply; "you are hasty, my dear, and don't consider."

"Yes, yes—I am wrong."

"It is for you to say what we shall do for him, wife—there is nothing I am not ready to consent to."

"Oh! George!"

"Look here now."

He pushed his breakfast cup aside, and began to lay down the law after his dear old fashion—the finger of one hand beating a kind of tune in the palm of the other.

"There's a matter of four thousand, three hundred pounds in the Bank of England—*your* money! I have ever considered it your money, Barbara, left to you by my old grandmother," said he, "it is for you to say

whether your brother's debts are to be paid with it or not."

"Oh! George!" I could only say again, with a great gulp.

"I have been inquiring about his debts—seen that tight-fisted cousin of mine, who holds on to the unfortunate, like a danged old leech, and find it can all be arranged for about thirteen hundred pounds; that will take, I find on calculation—on a great deal of calculation, for figures are the only things that trouble me much—thirty-nine pounds a year, from an income of a hundred and twenty-nine—leaving ninety pounds a year to live on, till I get some work, or the Decorticator turns out a fortune to us. Now, I'm not afraid of ninety pounds a year, little as it is—are you?"

"No, but—"

"But is it your wish, Barbara?"

"Oh! I don't like to say what is my wish in a case affecting you so much," I said, "but it is life or death to Andrew, perhaps, and,—and it is not my money, George!"

George Keldon laughed.

"What, the old money question, that so seriously disturbed your mind at Jersey?" said he; "well, the money is not strictly settled on yourself, I know, and I daresay the stockbroker would wonder at your impudence if you ordered him to sell out without delay—but *I* call it yours, and I am the best judge."

Seeing me still serious, he said—

"Shall I advise you, Barbara? Shall I tell you what I think the best—have thought the best, since yesterday?"

"Oh! yes, tell me."

"Have him out at once, and live on ninety pounds a year like a Nabob!"

I could not help flying into his arms and kissing him a great many times; could not stay the stings of self-reproach, for I had secretly mistrusted him—thought he would rather have the money in the Bank, and Andrew in the prison.

How easy to distrust the best and truest hearts that beat beside our own; how easy to live day after day, year after year, with husband, father, brother, and never judge them truly!

Two days after our little dialogue Andrew Bloyce lay ill upstairs;—the gates of the prison-house had been thrown back, and his creditors were satisfied. George Keldon, with some of the family shrewdness, had made the best bargain he could out of a very bad one; had fought hard for heavy discount with those creditors who had had a heavy interest for their money; had haggled; and twisted, and screwed from all, but Bartholomew—whose heart was as full of revenge as cupidity—something from the amount for which my brother was answerable. Altogether, twelve hundred pounds secured us Andrew; and if my generous-hearted husband thought he was dear for the money; never in his whole life, from the night Andrew came home an invalid, did he express one regretful word.

That same first night before we discovered out Andrew was so very ill, my brother said to George:—

“Keldon, I don’t deserve what you have done for me—I can’t repay it. I am even too sick at heart to thank you.”

"Thank *her*," with a jerk of his head towards me.

Keldon left the room in a hurry to escape Andrew's exhibition of gratitude, but a sudden thought occurring to him, he came as hurriedly back again.

"And there's only one way to thank her—by a better life, man!"

Andrew did not answer—he turned his face to the fire, and shaded it from us with his hand, retaining the same position long after George had quitted the room. I kept very silent, too; it was not the time to preach or worry him, and I know now for that silence, at that time, he was as grateful as for his deliverance.

The next day he was very ill—fever, even delirium, set in, and the doctor came and went twice a day, giving us hope, always hope, although so little sign of it was visible on the wan face upstairs. And in those moments when the brain was hot and the eyes glared at George or me unconsciously, one could tell that the arrow of remorse had fastened itself deep—he raved of Alice, and

how she was always at his side, accusing him for her own blighted life; he raved of Alice's eldest cousin, too, and how he had led him on and helped him in his plans to win her!

He was better and able to sit up when my father came to London, and cried over his dear boy.

"How kind of you to persuade him to come here," said the old man; "such a change for him—so much better than his old bachelor quarters!"

George Keldon looked suddenly into the Kingsland Road and had a quiet laugh to himself, but Andrew winced with pain—he was not so well able to appreciate the joke.

My father did not stay long in London—like all of his sex that I have ever known, he was of a restless nature; anxious for change till he had got it, and then grieving after the old monotony from which he had fled. No sooner in town, certain I was well and Andrew "getting on," than he was nervous about his Jersey farm and the old lady all alone at St. Brelade, and away his dear old

legs carried him before a fortnight had passed.

In that fortnight Colonel Hollingston and daughter disappeared. A little note from Miss Hollingston took me by surprise one day, thanking me and my husband for all past kindnesses, regretting that circumstances rendered her departure to some distance necessary, wishing me in the future, and in very graceful earnest language, health, wealth and happiness, and bidding me a long farewell.

In that fortnight, too, another surprise—a trial to George. I would have written a sore trial, but that he bore his troubles like no other man, and shook them from his sturdy shoulders ere they burdened him too heavily. It was in the evening when he told me, calling me from my watch over Andrew to the sitting-room downstairs. He had been out all day on business concerning the new decorticating process, and as home was never home without him, I was beginning to scold him for keeping away so long, when the grim expression of his counte-

nance startled me and cut short my address.

"Oh! George, dear, what's the matter!"

"Sit down—I want you to cheer me up a bit, my dear."

I sat down by his side, and he said, laying his hand on mine:—

"Here's the comfort of a wife—man's best friend and adviser when the world goes topsy-turvy with him! It don't seem so precious hard to bear now!"

"Is it about the Decorticator, George?"

"Yes, it is," he replied; "I have spent so many months over that machine, that it's grown quite like the second baby in the house—a nice, clean, oily baby, that only makes a noise when you turn a tap on! I have sifted and ground and decorticated till I have been quite a jolly miller in a small way—have seen the model grow, and my own ideas grow with it and turn to facts of some importance, and then—"

"What then?"

"And then have found the way to success just too late, and another man, a French beggar, on the road before me with the very

same ideas in his head that have been half splitting mine."

"How strange!"

"How aggravating, you mean," said Keldon, "to be beaten by a frog-eating mounseer, not four feet high, my girl. When I heard that he had come from France, and patented the thing three weeks ago, I had the curiosity to go and see the animal — by Jove, I could have eaten him!"

"And all your study, George — your labour—?"

"Counts for nothing. Hundreds of miles away, at the same model, planning, scheming in the same way, conquering the same difficulties, has that man worked with me and beaten me. But," his hand tightening its clasp, "it is not that I care so much for being beaten, as its the ill news I bring to you."

"We shall only have to wait a little longer for the better days," I said; "I don't mind how poor we are, so that we are happy and together."

"Ah! but we musn't go back," said Kel-

don; "let me see some progress, or put my shoulder to the wheel with greater force. I must look to regular work now—not live upon experiments."

"We are not so very poor, with three thousand pounds in the Bank of England, George."

"I suppose that better keep there," he replied; "though there are some men—such as my cousin Ernest, who would make it pay more than three per cent."

"Is speculation beginning to tempt you, too?" I asked, reproachfully.

"No, no," he said, quickly; "it was only a thought—don't you begin to fret about me, Barbara—think I'm going on the Stock Exchange, or out with a betting-book, and a white hat all on one side! It's only the wish to see you in a better position, a better home, that makes me unsatisfied; I could go back to Blackman's Gardens, and not care much about it, but I couldn't drag my wife along with me."

"For better for worse, George," I murmured, "you musn't forget that. And

whether we are to rise or fall in life, let the same love dwell with us, and you will not find me despair or feel less happy!"

"Well, it is happy to be together!— isn't it?"

They were accusing, mocking words twelve months hence, when the happiness of being "better off" had come, and we had found it the greatest trial of our lives. Man is never content with the present; happiness always lies beyond,—only to reach it, only reach to it and live the life of the blest! Lo! a turn of the wheel, the happiness lies at our feet, and we look back at the past and cry, "Oh! for the time back again when our cares were so few!"

END OF THE FOURTH BOOK.

BOOK V.

“The standard
Which the World condemns, or clears us by,
Is not our innocence, but our success.”

MRS. MANLEY.

“But this I learnd at Vertues gate,
The way to good is never late.”

ROBERT GREENE.

CHAPTER I.

“GETTING BETTER.”

IT was spring-time before Andrew was well enough to come downstairs; daffodils and wallflowers were blooming in our little patch of garden ground; the days were beginning to draw out beautifully! All the long winter Andrew had spent in the room upstairs; bearing his long illness with a patience and gentleness new to his character, expressing his thanks to us but little in words, and sitting in his pillowed chair by the fire, thinking—always thinking!

Whither his thoughts led him he never told me; the only signs of irritability he

evinced were when he was pressed to talk, or efforts were made to draw him from his deep fits of brooding. That despondency seemed a part of the disease which the fever at his brain had bequeathed him—that and his weakness were the only things to conquer now.

“Keep him cheerful,” were the medical injunctions hardest to fulfil, for it was a difficult task to bring a smile to his face. And at that time he was left so much alone, for I had discharged my little nursemaid, and there were housekeeping duties to fulfil as well as the boy to look after, whose lungs were too powerful for Andrew’s nerves at first. Then George was very busy, too; he had gone back to the pin-factory for a few months, and would trust no more to experiments. Not that he gave them up entirely, but he would not, as he said, “go head first at some cock-and-a-bull project, and never earn a penny to keep the mill going.” Of an evening he was at his studies, which had become more diffuse since I had not so much time to look after him, and which embracing electricity, galvanism, en-

gineering, hydrostatics and chemistry, ran away with more than half of his salary—a fact I never once informed him of; it was his own hard earnings, and he was so enthusiastic over his “ideas,” that it would have been cruelty to balk him.

Andrew went from the bed-room to the “workshop,” before his descent to the parlour, and my husband, one of the best of tacticians, drew him out by degrees, and interested him in his models, machines, or mixtures, as the case might be. It was curious to see Andrew in the place vacated by poor old Colonel Hollingston, requiring to be amused in the same manner by the same teacher—it was as if the law of retributive justice had ordained it should be so.

It was not till the spring then, that my brother was strong enough to form one of the family—not till one spring evening that he began to talk of his future. It was in “the gloaming,” and he had pushed his chair back from the firelight and sought refuge in the shadows. George had come down from his “study,” and was making himself

useful by amusing his son, whose tempers, owing to teething, had been rather variable that afternoon.

"I want you to make out something for me, Mr. Keldon?" he began.

"I'll try—hand it over?"

"It's nothing in my possession," replied Andrew; "it's a statement I refer to."

"I'm a bad hand at statements, Bloyce."

"I wish to know the exact sum I am indebted to you," explained Andrew, hoarsely; "the money you have spent on me, the doctor's bills you have paid, the fees the physician has taken, the amount that set me free from Whitecross Street."

"My dear Andrew—" I began.

"My dear sister," he interrupted; "I don't know that I shall ever be able to pay you. My future is not of the brightest, my hopes not the most sanguine—still I should like the account made out."

"All right—some day or other you shall have it," said Keldon, eager to dismiss the subject.

"Any day this week will do."

"I'm very busy this week," said Keldon ;
"but as soon as I can find time, I'll have a
go in at the accounts."

"Don't put me off," said Andrew, peev-
ishly ; "I want it in my hands—ever before
my eyes a reproach."

"Then you won't have it at all!" cried
my husband.

"Ever before me a warning," continued
Andrew ; "telling me to stop when the ex-
citement of the old gambling life tempts
me ; showing me to what disgrace I brought
myself, and what debt of kindness, as well
as money, I owe you."

"It shall be given you, Andrew," I said,
readily.

"Thank you, and next week I shall be
strong enough to rid you of a blight that
has rested on your home too long."

My heart beat faster with the dread of
losing him—with the knowledge that he
was thinking of that world again in which
he had been so weak !

"What do you mean by that ?" said
Keldon, setting down the baby and looking

hard into the dark corner whither Andrew had retreated.

"That I must leave you next week."

"And make my wife ill fretting after you—that won't do, Bloyce!"

"I can't stay here," he cried, "and you working like a slave. Every stroke of your hammer at home might as well be on my heart, for it sinks there with a dead weight, and reproaches me for living—sponging on you! And, Barbara, I must go," he added, turning to me, "for your affection pains me too, I am not worthy of it. It is torture to know how ignorant I have been of your goodness—and worse to know that each day adds to a debt which no effort of mine can repay."

"Let me have the old brother's love in return—"

He shuddered.

"It would turn to a curse from such as I am—I dare not offer it!"

"What do you think of doing, Bloyce?" asked Keldon.

"I don't know—don't care! I haven't thought of it."

"You have thought enough about something lately," replied George.

"Of the past—only of the dark sinful past. There was not manly courage in me sufficient to face *my* future."

"Your future may be a bright one yet," I said.

"Never."

"It may make amends for all the past."

"It can't do that!"

He was thinking of Alice when he uttered that reply—the deep tremor in his voice assured me of it.

"You talk of going away, knowing not what to do—and caring, as it seems to me, even 'less," said Keldon; "such a spirit as that will soon make you reckless, and take you back to the life you wish to shun. To talk of beginning a new life and caring not what the life is, or what becomes of you, is sheer tomfoolery!"

"I want little now."

"You want 'looking after, and that is a great deal," replied Keldon; "it isn't anything that'll suit you, little as you care

about it. A clerk's berth would kill you, and an omnibus conductor's is rather a fatiguing situation."

Andrew did not answer.

"I have it!" said Keldon; "you want to pay off some of your debts, you say, Bloyce?"

"Yes."

"Try the piano-forte again. Practise a week or two and get your hand in, and then go slap at the opera, or anything that'll sell; but," with startling emphasis, "try it in this house, or you'll be running away and spending the money. If there's Barbara to look after you, you'll get used to one kind of work; and if any of your old pals in white hats come to ask what odds you'll give against the Devil and all his Imps, why, just let *me* see 'em to the door, that's all!"

"But—"

"But the whole of it is, Andrew Bloyce," said Keldon, "you are not fit to be alone at present. The world is a very big ball that you are not strong enough to play with. If you mean well, if you are sorry for the past life and all the evil you have caused in it,

show your humility and let your sister take care of you ; but if you are only shamming the good boy who means to be bad at the very first opportunity, go when you like, but never come back any more."

"Keldon—I'll stop!"

My husband walked to the dark corner, and nearly knocked Andrew out of the chair with his hearty slap between the shoulders.

"That's a brave answer, and Jem shall bring my piano back to-morrow. The sooner you are at work, instead of sitting all of a heap like a *sillikin*, the better. I'll go to Jem to-morrow."

"What Jem?" I could not help exclaiming.

"Why, that musical fellow who lodged with me in Blackman's Gardens—didn't I lend him the piano at twenty shillings a month after the baby was born, and you were too busy to play? It was no good keeping it at home."

I had no idea George was so deceitful. The fertility of his imagination almost took my breath away. When he had retired

to his workshop, and the gas was lighted in the parlour, Andrew said :—

“ You should be a very happy woman, Barbara.”

“ God knows I am.”

“ If I had known a George Keldon seven years ago !” he moaned ; “ if there had been but one true friend to trust in !”

“ The future, now, dear, the future to look forward to—”

“ Ay, and the past to atone for !”

The excitement of that evening was almost too much for Andrew—the next day he was not so well ; he kept to his room, and only came down in the evening at our solicitation to see the piano which “ Jem ” had sent home. “ Jem ” had taken great care of the piano—it looked like a new one to me ; and if I were mistaken, how would George have accounted for fifty pounds less in the bank of his Grandmother's money ? Andrew did not appear to notice the excellent condition of the instrument, but as his hands wandered carelessly over the keys, I could see his lip quivering.

In old time Andrew's had been a proud spirit, and to subdue it had ever been the hardest of trials. It was a trial now; the trial of being treated as an old and valued friend—he who had so ill deserved the least favour, who had thought in old time so little of others, and so much of himself!

And as he stood there trifling with the keys, striking wild, yet harmonious chords which seemed the echoes of his own sad thoughts, could he subdue the past at that time—was it natural? From the misty depths of bygone times rose not the figure of the boy of genius, whose love for music was his food and drink; grouped not round him the friends of the old home, who had watched his talent, and believed the day would come when it would shine before the world—who had, perhaps, told him so too soon, and helped to spoil him? Came not figures from a less distant past, when the opera was begun, and he had many pupils; flitted not by one figure of a young, romantic girl, his first love, whom he was

ambitious enough to seek to win—unworthy enough, alas! to abuse the confidence placed in him? Were not the figures of the boy and his home friends, that of the maiden and the friends of the world, all accusing phantoms, which gave that tremulous motion to his fingers, that thrilling wail to the music?

“Hold hard,” said Keldon, at last; “my hair’s on end! If that kind of thing is in the opera, you had better not go on with it.”

“I had forgotten myself,” said Andrew, turning away.

“Do you think the piano a good tone?”

“Very—the keys want working a little.”

“Yes. Jem hasn’t been at them lately, poor fellow,” muttered Keldon, as tenderly as if there were a real Jem seriously ill somewhere.

That piano was a loadstone to my husband; it was about the only thing in the house, except myself, the baby and Andrew, that he had not taken to pieces. He fidgeted round it something after the manner

of the kitten at his feet who had been taken aback herself by the arrival of so large a piece of furniture; he opened the top once or twice, and he had got his hands amongst the hammers, when I startled him by my—

“What *are* you doing, George?”

“Nothing much,” said George, abashed.

“Any one would think you had never seen it before,” I remarked.

George scratched his head at this, looked round the room once or twice in search of an answer, and, not finding anything appropriate, went upstairs into the workshop.

That very evening, Andrew was surprised by my looking out and laying on the table the MS. sheets of his opera.

“There they are, dear, if you should want them in the morning.”

“Why, how did they get into your hands?”

“I called at Pimlico for them—you were ill at that time, Andrew.”

“I see—I see,” he groaned, “every day

some new proof of your kindness, and my baseness. There was a heavy debt there for those apartments."

"You haven't a debt in the world, Andrew—don't harass me with your gloomy looks."

"My account has not come forward yet," said Andrew; "let me know what I have to fight for, Barbara; I think it will do me good, and teach me perseverance. Put away the opera for the present; it must be like your good husband's experiments, work in overtime that is not so certain of remuneration. Perhaps to-morrow I'll try a waltz, or something—I wonder if my old music publishers will remember me."

He began a waltz on the morrow; he sat down with a brighter look than he had hitherto worn in my house, and he went humbly but earnestly to work. He was working all that day, but the result did not satisfy him; for his mind had not been in a dancing humour, and the waltz was too laboured to be worth anything. Still the effort did him good, and, what is more, kept

George the second in a state of quiescent wonder for several hours—indeed after his surprise was got over, for the first time in his small life he cried to go to Andrew. Alas! that human life should be full of deceit and selfishness, even at the beginning; the baby wanted to thump the keys of the piano, and Andrew was nearest them!

Perhaps the greatest wonder of that day, though, was to see Andrew take the child upon his knee, and let him thump to his heart's content. If only the scamps and black legs he had known a few months since could have seen their friend and brother *then*?

Waltzes not proving congenial to the mood of Andrew Bloyce, he composed the next day a gloomy baritone song for the villain of the opera, whilst I sat by the fire and read the libretto of the first act. The baritone song was peculiar—a very sad song of what might have been and wasn't, wedded to a melody that touched you a little, and was therefore good music. Andrew had a fair voice for an amateur, and

he hummed over the ballad all the afternoon, and took down his notes at times, and was altogether busy. In the height of business a brisk rat-a-tat alarmed Andrew, who closed the piano with a bang and rose to leave the room. He had a horror of meeting a strange face now, or else a face he knew too well and had gazed at too often !

"It cannot be any friend of ours," said I; "don't look so scared, Andrew. A tax-collector most likely."

The maid entered with a card.

"Oh, dear !"

"Who is it, Barbara—who is it?" cried Andrew.

"Mr. Ernest Tresdaile ! Pray, sit still. By leaving the room, you cannot escape him."

Andrew had turned very white, but as Ernest Tresdaile entered, his face became more ghastly still. The quick glance of Ernest took in the piano, and the figure bending over it, in an instant. There was no sign of recognition attempted on either

side; courtesy, at that time, in that first meeting, would but have been a mockery.

Ernest Tresdaile shook hands with me warmly, asked after my husband's health, rattled away about the weather and the season, till Andrew Bloyce had risen and left us together.

"Your brother here?" with an elevation of the eyebrows.

"Yes, Mr. Tresdaile—he has been very ill."

"So I see."

Andrew was an embarrassing subject to dwell upon. I hastened to inquire after Alice, the mention of whose name I had spared my brother in his presence.

"Not strong, Mrs. Keldon, but pretty well in health, considering! Very calm, and firm, and grave, like one who suffers and would hide all sign of pain."

"Is she in London?"

"No—still in Devonshire."

"Mr. Ernest, I hope you are not deceiving me—that she is not worse?"

"Oh no—getting better, getting better fast," replied Ernest, in his rapid manner;

"the doctor says 'fast' and he ought to know: to me it is a cancerpallar progress, that almost drives me mad. But she is not going to die of misplaced love, and all that non-sense—no, no!"

"Is she alone in Devonshire?"

"Yes that's the worst of it," said Ernest; "that's the great evil which I have come to London to cure. Alice must have a companion, and Miss Hollingston is the very one for her."

"Miss Hollingston?" I exclaimed, in surprise.

"Who better than Miss Hollingston?" inquired Ernest: "an old friend, an accomplished lady, her deliverer."

"Yes, yes—but the Colonel?"

"Why, you must have known it surely, before I saw it in the paper!"

"Saw what?"

"The announcement of the death of Colonel Hollingston, late of her Majesty's—th Regiment of foot."

"Poor old gentleman!—oh! I am so sorry!" was my first exclamation.

"I suppose Miss H. took that means of apprising her relatives of the Colonel's decease—the address in the Kingsland Road was not mentioned."

"Miss Hollingston has left the Kingsland Road some time."

"God bless my soul!" exclaimed Ernest, startled out of his usual impassiveness; "left the Kingsland Road! Just as Alice and I had planned a home for her; this won't do—she must be found, poor girl. Mrs. Keldon, have you not the slightest idea where she is?"

"No, sir. She did not give her address in a letter of farewell, written to me two months since."

"I'll soon discover her," said he, his self-confidence beginning to assert itself; "it will not take a detective to trace her to her home. When did she leave?—who removed the furniture?—what is the address of the landlord next door—what is the post-mark on the letter she sent you?—where is the letter?"

It was impossible to reply to all his ques-

tions; I had not sought to find Miss Hollingston, and to break upon the new retreat she had chosen from the old fashionable world. I gave him Miss Hollingston's letter, the envelope of which he only looked at.

"No place stamped—the clumsy rascal of a postmaster—nevermind. Round obliterated stamp, that's London," said Ernest, volubly; "the number 39 in the centre, that's Hammersmith. Now, if I can only find the man who took the goods away—why, as she wanted to leave quietly, he lives at Hammersmith, for a sovereign! Good morning, Mrs. Keldon—remember me to George. When we return to London we shall see you both, I hope."

"This is a short visit, Mr. Ernest."

"I promised Alice I would call and see if you were well;" said he, "she had some foolish foreboding—girls are all forebodings—that you were ill, or in great trouble. I shall take back, at least, some good news."

"When do you think of returning to London?"

"Soon I hope," said Ernest, "the country

is a monotonous place to me, and I have been wasting time in it finely, with the stocks going up and down too, in rare style, and half a hundred good chances in railway shares lost entirely."

"Am I friend enough to hope you are not too speculative, Mr. Ernest?"

He laughed.

"I shall take care—I do not go into the world with my eyes shut," said he conceitedly; "and it will not pay to let grandmother's money rust in idleness—and three per cent. *is* idleness!"

"A great many people seem to think so."

"Now, I might have doubled Alice's fortune, as well as my own, if the will had not specified the interest of the money was only to be drawn—a silly trick, to lock money up in that manner. But I really must be off."

He had shaken hands with me, and was bustling towards the door, when a sudden thought arrested his progress.

"Oh!" said he, catching hold of his chin and coming to a halt, "may I ask a question?"

"Certainly."

"Your brother—will he stay here long, Mrs. Keldon?"

"I trust so."

"Trust so, eh?"

The grey eyes looked inquisitively at me through the spectacles.

"Yes, though his presence here will keep a very dear and valued friend away. I hope so, Mr. Tresdaile, for his own sake; for the sake of the honest efforts he is making in the new life began here."

"What is he doing?"

"He has turned back to his old profession of music, and has given up all his false friends."

"And you have hopes of him?"

"Yes."

"My dear Mrs. Keldon," said Ernest, "will you take a friend's advice, and not build too much upon those hopes—a worldly friend's advice, perhaps, but none the worse for that. True repentance in a man is very rare—in a man like Mr. Bloyce, a marvel. There, I pain you, and I'll say no more."

He did say more, though in a whisper to himself, and my quick ears caught the words:—

“It can't last!—it's impossible to last!”

When he was shaking hands with me a second time, he said:—

“When you come to see us in Stamford Street—and you will come for Alice's sake, I am sure—pray say nothing of this attempt at reformation in your brother. No good can follow it, and much pain may arise. His name for ever, in my sister's presence, is forbidden.”

“I would not be cruel enough to pain her by the mention of it.”

“Thank you.”

The door had hardly closed behind him when Andrew entered the room he had quitted.

“What does he say—what does he say of Alice?” he asked, eagerly.

“She is in Devonshire.”

“Ill?”

“Not well, but getting better.”

Andrew did not play the piano again that

day; he took his seat by the fireside and plunged into the dark thoughts from which George and I had had such trouble to arouse him. Hour after hour passed thus, and all my talk of the present was responded to in vague monosyllables. Anything was better than that blank apathy—I told him of the death of Colonel Hollingston. He roused at that.

“Who can say I am not answerable for the old man’s death?” he cried; “shall not have to answer for it when the world has rolled away from my feet and the Judge is before me? I knew the weakness of his mind, and was the first to profit by it—I dragged him with myself to ruin! Oh! there is no future for me,” he cried, despairingly; “what good can come of my struggles to be honest? Let me sink!”

As I strove to reassure him, he broke away from my consoling words, and said, in a husky whisper:—

“Barbara, if anything happens to Alice, I shall be as much her murderer as though I had struck her with a knife.”

"Her youth will soon restore her to health and strength," I said.

He did not respond to my assertion ; he went on following his own train of thought.

"Better to have been the whole villain than the half—the knave and cold-blooded wretch her brother thought me."

"Oh ! don't say that."

"I should not have deceived her then," said he ; "she would have recoiled from me before the plot was laid, and seen the scheming which went on side by side with the growth of my mad passion. But my love blinded her, won her affection, too, and led me on to no better, higher thoughts. I loved her, but I loved money too. I would have married her without a penny in the world, but I would have striven first to have made a miser's bargain."

"Say for one moment the past could be retraced," I cried—"that your life could begin from Hastings ; she, the happy thoughtless girl, you the man of the world—would the same part be acted once again ? "

"God forbid!"

"Then my hopes shall not die out!" I replied; "you will not fall to a lower depth than this, and abuse my trust—my husband's trust—in you!"

"Ha!" cried Andrew, "who said I should fall?"

"Ernest Tresdaile."

"What did he say, Barbara?—try and remember every word he said."

I told him, and he listened with trembling eagerness. When I had finished, he said:—

"And he will tell that to the world, to his friends, to *her*! And they will believe it—*must* believe it, for my weak, wilful nature is well known. Yes, slowly, slowly, sinking!"

"No, no—rising! Throwing off with every step some fault, some folly; atoning at every step, perhaps, and doing the best that God allows you for those injured in the old life cast away; showing the world, *her*, that honour, honesty and energy were not all trodden underfoot."

“God bless you!”

He kissed my hand, then held it in his own, and murmured something to himself; something which gave a brighter, nobler look to the face once so handsome, but—so false!

CHAPTER II.

THE SEVENTH OF JUNE.

ANDREW worked earnestly and patiently at his opera after that day. As the work grew under his hands, it became no longer a work, but a labour of love—like the painting to the artist, the book to the author; his own interest revived in it, and the sheets of MS. music began to increase very fast. Spring made no surer progress towards summer, adding to each week more of the bright daylight, than Andrew, adding daily to his opera, advanced towards the grand *finale*.

I often wondered, as I watched his labour, what were his thoughts concerning

the destiny of that opera ; whether he had fully calculated the difficulties of procuring a reader for it, the greater difficulties of finding a purchaser—whether, indeed, being his first creation, it were not full of those faults naturally attendant on the work of a beginner, and which only hard work and experience would remove. I knew enough of music, had sufficient taste in music, to be certain there was genius in the opera ; but how far that genius would go to its success with a keen-sighted, hard-hearted, critical public, it was difficult to guess. George and I used to talk this over when we were alone ; for we feared to cast the least shadow on the labours of Andrew who never once spoke of the opera's destination, of what was to be done, or which way he should turn when the last bar was written ; he struggled on with his ambitious work, composed, revised, expunged, restored, and lived on in the present alone. When the days of weariness came—as they will come to him who has a great task before him—Andrew did not sit

idle till the genius awakened and put fresh thoughts in his head. He had a horror of being idle ; he must work in some shape or other now ; to remain still was to feel creeping over him the sense of all that had unmanned him before his resolutions were made. Ballads and dance music he struck off with rapidity, and there were few publishers who were not glad to purchase all that he composed. It was pleasant to see often in the papers the advertisement of a new piece of music by "Brelade," the name he had adopted in remembrance of Jersey times. I began to be afraid that he would not recover his strength if he worked so assiduously, that the features would retain that pinched expression, and the ashen look would never go away. I strove to induce him to take longer walks, but he was restless and excitable out of doors ; the fear of meeting his past associates, or of coming face to face with Alice and her brother, never seemed to leave him. I spoke of his obtaining pupils again, even procured him one, the son of a tradesman with whom I

dealt, but he would make no effort to increase his number; he hated strangers—they would be taking him into the world again!

Meanwhile baby grew out of his things, required a fresh wardrobe and kept me continually busy, and George Keldon remained at the pin-factory and experimentalized in leisure time. Never was such an industrious household; late to bed and early to rise was the universal motto. I was happy again in my quiet way—only the continued absence of Alice, and the uncertainty about her health, disturbed my mind. There were no signs of Andrew's resolution failing him, and if he did not get very strong, there was no relapse, or acknowledgment of weakness. I was happy in my *quiet* way I say, for I could have preferred my husband not so much in the workshop, and Andrew less often at the piano. It was all work and no play, and only on Sundays were we three together for any length of time. But can we be ever satisfied in this great, discontented world of ours—will no

experience of past storms ever teach us a lesson? George was very busy with his diving-bell at this period — perhaps the reader remembers, that it was at my wish he had set it aside during the Decorticator's progress — and his arrival in the evening was the signal for a series of experiments, very ingenious but very sloppy. Half a dozen models, at least, were continually descending into tubs and pails of water, some of which were sure to be kicked over in the course of the evening, the space being limited and George's legs inclined to reckless strides. Sometimes I worked at the air-pump, whilst he pursued his inquiries in another direction ; fastened the kitten in the largest bell and submerged it—or, struck with a new idea, secured it on paper, before a second discovery knocked it out of his memory. I am inclined to believe, that in his enthusiastic moments, and for the benefit of science, he would have submerged the baby had the model been large enough, or had my temperament been sufficiently Spartan to allow it.

There came a day in the early summer time, when the opera was finished ; when it only required some fair copying out, and a little revision here and there, to be presented to whoever would have the courage to look at it.

"There!" cried Andrew, "it is done!"

I hastened to congratulate him, to wish him every success ; plenty of laurels and—money. George came down from his workshop to shake him by the hand, and wish him the best of luck, too. Andrew's eyes quite sparkled again ; it was so new to have all those good wishes, so strange to feel himself at the end of a task began so many years ago.

"I dreamed of this day once," said Andrew ; "when I was a boy," he added, mournfully, "with a boy's heart!"

"You have beaten the diving-bell hollow," said Keldon ; "and I intended to beat you, old fellow."

"The bell will be launched before the opera, perhaps."

"I hope not," answered Keldon ; "or it

will be a long time before the newspapers are praising you up and running you down—one saying what a clever chap you are, and the other what a muff! No, no, the diving-bell hangs fire, Bloyce; it won't do what I want; it's an obstinate, unmanageable affair, and will act just as other bells act—any fool can make them, you know!”

“I should give the diving-bell up, Keldon,” said Andrew.

“I'll swallow it first,” replied my husband.

He left the house a few minutes after that assertion, and returned shortly afterwards with a bottle of wine in each pocket.

“We'll have a *soirée*, old boy, on the strength of the opera, and the baby shall sit up to supper,” said he; “what is to-day?”

“Saturday, June the seventh.”

“Saturday is a lucky day,” said Keldon; “don't let us forget Saturday, the seventh of June—who knows what may date from it.”

“It may be a day of very harsh re-

membrance," said Andrew; "we will not dwell too much upon it yet."

"And even if the opera fail," I suggested, "it will be something to remember for what it was written, and with what resolutions."

"Ever a consoler," said Andrew; "but I should not like to think of it failing—of the failure cutting away beneath me all my hopes of a name."

"Oh! that won't fail," said Keldon, cheerfully.

"Well, I don't think it will," was Andrew's answer; "somehow, since I have composed it, my sanguine temperament has stolen back to me—you remember, Barbara, I was always so sure of success?"

"Yes, yes."

"And I *must* think of success, and build my castle in the air—it does me good," he said; "why, how shall I pay my debts if that opera fail, and what encouragement will there be to persevere after that?"

George came out with his customary "Hold hard!" He let the corkscrew remain in the bottle and looked across the table at Andrew.

"That sounds too much like an attempt at a bargain with the Fates, or something higher, Bloyce," he said; "it is no good saying, 'Befriend me, or I turn desperate!' It isn't natural—it isn't manly!"

"Right, right!—I was always a coward."

"I lost a year over that wheat-grinding and cleansing machine, but I did not jump into it and turn the steam on when mon-seer stole a march on me."

"Don't compare yourself with me," said Andrew, hastily; "I have only one hope, you have fifty. One sinks away from you, and there remains wife, child, home, and all that makes home happy — one sinks away from me, and my heavy heart sinks with it!"

"Oh! we'd soon fish it up again," answered Keldon; "did I ever show you my new machine for raising heavy weights?"

"Is that it?" said Andrew, pointing half mockingly to the wine bottle.

"Well, no," replied Keldon; "stuff like this has sent the man after his losses, I've heard, but never brought them back again."

But," with a twinkle in his eye, "it isn't fair to give bad names to an article that's just cost me nine shillings, besides sixpence deposit on the bottles."

Keldon was in high spirits that evening; and Andrew, with his new work completed and his one hope unscathed, was soon cheered out of the mood into which our own careless expressions had cast him.

"Here's success to the opera!" cried Keldon, when the glasses were filled; "a long life and a merry one — the father of a hundred more operas—hip, hip, hurrah!"

And with his boisterous lungs he set up such a shout that, as a matter of course, George the second, who had been sitting in my lap regarding with eyes of wonder his parent's proceedings, fell back in my lap, and nearly went into convulsions.

"Oh! George, how violent you are!"

"Bless my soul, I forgot the baby," said Keldon, rather abashed; "poor little chap, what a row he is making! Here, Georgy, hold hard, my man — do you think a

glass of wine would hurt him, Barbara?"

"Only choke him, my dear."

"Very good, then we'll reserve it for more legitimate purposes, and Georgy, my boy," in so impressive a manner that even Georgy stopped a moment, "don't forget your uncle's opera, the next mug of sop you get hold of."

And Georgy burst out in a fresh place at this indignity. However, we drank success to the opera, and Andrew thanked us with tears in his eyes—not alone for our good wishes, but for the past encouragement and kindness which had sustained him in his task.

"I dare not think of what might have happened, if you had not acted the Samaritan," he said—"if you had not given away much of your income to save one unworthy of the sacrifice, I—"

"We won't talk any more about that, Bloyce," interrupted Keldon; "this is a red-letter day, and there is no need to go melancholy mad in it. No more maundering to-night."

He was refilling the glasses, when the postman knocked at the door. We were troubled with few correspondents, and the arrival of the government official was always a matter of some excitement to me.

"That's from Jersey," I said, quickly.

I was so far a hypocrite that I did not believe my assertion, having but recently received a letter from that quarter. In my heart I believed it was news of Alice, but there were reasons sufficiently plain, more especially on that night, why her name should not be mentioned. The small maid in our service opened the street door, and was heard in deep confabulation with the postman. After a while she tapped at our room-door, and came in :—

"If you please, sir, the postman wants to see you."

"Wants to see me, eh?" repeated Keldon, as he rose; "well, there is no accounting for taste."

Second confabulation in the passage, then Keldon's voice was heard to say :—

"Yes, it's quite right, my man—there's

the elevenpence-halfpenny — good-night.”

George Keldon came into the parlour again and laughed—in rather a forced manner, I thought—by way of reply to my inquiring look.

“It’s not a summons, or a property-tax, or anything awful,” said he; “it’s a letter that has been wandering about town a little, having been directed to Blackman’s Gardens, Hackney.”

He tossed the letter on the table; it was a brown, travel-stained epistle, with a peculiar postage-stamp in the corner, and the envelope stamped in half-a-dozen places, and the first address scratched out and the second written in by some one in a hurry, who had smeared it with his coat sleeve—altogether a disreputable missive.

“What can be in it?” I said.

Looking into George’s face, I read an expression thereon that startled me—a grave, almost sorrowful, expression, very new upon a face like his.

“You know what is in this, George?—I’m sure you do!”

"Upon my word I don't."

I took up the letter, across the back of which was stamped "ST. PETERSBURGH," glanced at the great embossed seal, laid it down again more bewildered than ever.

"It must be a mistake—you never wrote to any one in Russia, dear?"

"Not since you have been Mrs. Keldon?"

"Before?"

"Yes, once."

"Oh! dear me, and you never told me!"

"I never thought of it, my dear," said Keldon; "it was a forlorn hope, dead and gone months before I went to Jersey. Previous to breaking the seal I'll tell you all about it—it's not a long story."

Taking up the letter again, and twisting it round and round in his hand, my husband began.—

"Three years ago, just before the Russian War, there was an advertisement in a mechanics' magazine I used to spell over at the coffee-shop, an advertisement which set me puzzling my head a bit. There was a submarine cable to be sunk somewhere in

Russia, and plans and specimens of wire were requested, together with any suggestions that might be got out of the inventor, and might be of service to the advertiser. So you see it was a competition affair, where the best man is supposed to get the job, and—never does, to my knowledge.”

“But did you know anything about submarine telegraphs, dear?”

“I knew a little about electricity and galvanic batteries and so on, and I had had in my head for a year before the advertisement such an idea for submerging telegraphic wire—in fact, I wrote to government concerning it.”

“And received no answer,” said Bloyce.

“There you’re wrong,” replied Keldon; “I got the politest and genteelest answer, written on the most beautiful paper, stating the honour Her Majesty’s Government felt my offer, &c., and informing me I should be written to when my services were required—which they weren’t, of course. It’s only the official way of shutting your shop up!”

"But—but that letter, George?" said I.

"We're coming to it fast, my dear," replied Keldon; "well, that advertisement in the paper bothered me the next day—I had not thought much of it, at first—and I set to work every evening after that, and twisted wires and made a machine for coating them with gutta-percha on a new principle, and studied precious hard, with my poor old dad in the corner going it awfully on the flute. The thing was done at last, was sent off, and no more was heard of my ideas or designs, which went the way, as I thought, of all the rest of them. When I have considered them since—and that's not been once since my marriage—it was to laugh at my own notion of getting a good berth for a year or two under a Russian Government, and to wonder who translated my rough English into the native tongue; and here's the answer at last, Barbara, executed, as the circulars say, with punctuality and despatch. Perhaps it's to tell me, that all the learned heads in Muscovy haven't been able to make out my pot-hooks and

hangers, or to inform me that peace having been agreed to, the letters of English barbarians will be immediately replied to. Here goes!"

And Keldon broke the seal and opened the document. A long letter, written in bad English, with an indifferent pen; a letter that absorbed all my husband's attention, and increased the size of his eyes to an incredible extent, and turned him pale and red, and made him gasp for breath.

"Barbara," said he at last, in a hoarse voice, "it's accepted! My plan is the best, safest, cheapest—I'm to go to Russia to superintend the laying of this telegraph—here's good luck for all of us at last!"

Good luck was it? It did not seem like good luck to me, with my knees knocking together, and a deadly faintness coming over me. I had to hold by the table to keep myself from falling off the chair.

"To go—to—Russia?"

"Yes, immediately upon receipt of this. War's over, and they want to set to work at once. Here's a thousand or two

to be made by this, to say nothing of the future and the—what's the matter, what's the matter!"

I don't remember anything more—whether it were hours or minutes before I woke, as from a heavy, painful sleep, and found myself in the easy chair by the open window, with the cool night air blowing on me, and George and my brother bending over me.

"Has anything happened?" was my first, faint inquiry.

"Nothing, my dear, nothing—only some nonsense of mine, which came too suddenly upon you," said Keldon; "just a little joke, which you weren't strong enough to bear, and I was a thundering jackass to make, that's all."

"You were going away," I cried; "didn't you talk of going away!"

"Yes, yes," said he, soothingly; "but it was all my nonsense. I couldn't take you and the baby with me, and I wouldn't go without you to be Emperor of all the Rus-

sias — and the Prussias into the bargain. My joke, dear, my joke!"

"Oh! I am so glad you were not in earnest—that it is not a disappointment to you, George."

"When I read the letter, Barbara, I only thought of myself; forgot for the moment the husband and father time had made of me, since I tried for the Russian prizes. It's simply impossible now."

"Then, it wasn't a joke, George?"

"Not exactly a joke, perhaps," replied my husband; "a kind of mixture of joke and earnest; to show as it were how I should have felt, upon receiving a letter like that once upon a time—when I was a single young man, and had nothing in the future to look forward to. But everything turns out for the best; suppose eighteen months ago, when I was in trouble, this letter had arrived, I should have gone away to Russia, and never known the value of the truest, best of hearts!"

He laid the letter on the mantel-piece, setting aside with it, as it were, the hopes it

had engendered. He put on his brightest looks, and spoke in his lightest manner of the runaway husband he might have been ; changed the subject to Andrew's opera, filled the glasses, and drank his wine right off ; filled a second time and emptied his glass again. He was in the best of spirits, told us anecdotes of his factory life, and kept Andrew laughing ; played with the baby, did all in his power to dissipate the gloom which, despite his efforts, despite mine, seemed to close round and stifle me.

Andrew, who had expressed no opinion as to my husband's determination, who had perhaps read correctly what was in both our hearts, went early to his room, and I repaired to my own and put my boy to sleep in his cot by the bed-side, leaving my husband at the table over the fragments of the feast. Left alone, after my child was sleeping peacefully, I could think in the silence of my room of what had happened, what was for the best, and what was the duty of *his* wife ? I had not long to think

— my duty rose before me very plainly, and I had to cry silently to myself; to pray silently, also, for a selfish woman's pardon.

I stole softly downstairs again to talk the matter over with him, to give him counsel, and to receive, as I even hoped to give, comfort for a parting so sudden and so bitter!

He was standing by the mantel-piece, reading the letter again; he crumpled it in his hand as I entered, and turned away with a heightened colour.

"Will you let me see that letter, George?"

"My dear girl, what's the good of it?"

"I should like to read it very much."

He put the letter in my hand without another word, and sat down opposite to me.

The lines swam before my eyes as I began, but I gathered courage as I proceeded, and read on calmly to the end; the brown, earnest eyes of him I loved before all the world bent upon me steadfastly.

"George," said I, refolding the letter at last and looking up into his face, "you are not sorry we were ever married—this letter does not make you regret that, even for the first time?"

"Can all the letters, arguments, or people in the world make me regret it?—I should hope not."

"I have read this offer very carefully," I continued; "it speaks a great deal of my dear, clever husband, opens a road to a position far higher than he has yet attained, leads the way to greatness."

"Perhaps so—put it away."

"Once superintendent of a great work like this, your name established, and your genius acknowledged, there is independence for you anywhere—is it not so?"

"A chance of independence," with an affected carelessness, that did not deceive my searching gaze.

"There is no breaking up home and going with you. I am not very strong just now, the climate might kill our boy, and we must even think of Andrew for a

little while — for without us he would sink."

"Yes, yes, dear," said Keldon; "I see all that, and I should be the worst of husbands, and the most unfeeling of villains to dream of going alone—I don't dream of it."

"But we must think deliberately of this —there is so much to consider before we rashly make up our minds to keep together all our lives. Together, perhaps, in poverty, with children rising round us, and debts increasing, and friends, and health, and everything but our love falling fast away."

"*But* our love — why, that's everything!"

"Have we been fortunate enough since our marriage, Keldon, to justify us in the refusal of this offer for the mere selfish wish to be together? —have we a right to turn away from such a chance of rising in the world?"

"Barbara, I determined what to do when I saw your face change like death at the

very thought of parting. What do I care for so many hundreds a-year without you ; what's fame, or name, or wealth, with a lump of misery into the bargain ? ”

“ It is parting for a year—two years at most. Can we not make the sacrifice, we who are both young, and have faith in each other ? ”

“ Can you ? ”

“ I will try. With so much to look forward to, I can endure much. Cheered by the hope of the bright days, by the knowledge that you are well and succeeding in your undertaking, I can bear everything in the present.”

“ A brave heart, my girl,” said he, drawing me to his side, “ but I won't put it to the trial.”

“ Oh ! but you will, when your strong mind considers everything,” I replied ; “ you mustn't consider my trials or your own in this case.”

“ I don't see why I should consider anybody else's.”

“ Don't you see it is your duty, George,

to do your best for our little son upstairs, not to shut out *his* chances in the world even with your own?—don't you know," I added, in a lower tone, "that four or five months hence, please God, there will be another baby face to brighten home—a second sacred charge entrusted to us?"

He was silent.

"We must not forget our duty in our love, or rashly fling away an opportunity that may never come again—which comes to you now like a reward for all your honest labour, perseverance."

"But to go away, Barbara, knowing the trial you must pass through—good God! to be hundreds and hundreds of miles away at such a time!"

"I do not fear your absence, or dread that trial," I replied; "He who has blest us with His mercy heretofore will watch over me—and if He take me from you, it is His good will, and your stay here will not help me. George, you *must* go!"

"Well, I will think of it."

"Don't think of the pain your absence

will cause me—rather think of the self-reproach that will remain to you, to us, in all our after-course of life, if the clouds shut out this sunshine.”

“A queer sort of sunshine,” said he, grimly; “anything else to think of?”

“Yourself—the rightful position you will assume for the first time.”

“Anything else?”

“Yes, our hour of meeting when you return successful, and our new life begins together.”

“Didn’t we promise to be together till Death parted us?”

“We shall never be divided in our hearts.”

“Right, Barbara—always right. What a woman you are!—well, I’ll think of it.”

So it was settled he was to think of it; and I knew in my heart—my heavy sinking heart—what he would answer, what he had a right to answer, for the sake of all beneath his roof. It was his duty, and had he ever flinched from it?

Late on the Sunday night, when we were

returning from a quiet ramble after church, talking of everything but the one great topic which absorbed the minds of both, he said, suddenly :—

“ Yes, Barbara—it must be ! ”

Looking into his troubled face, there was no need to ask him what he meant !

CHAPTER III.

THE LAST TWO DAYS.

IN a very early stage of this history I have spoken of the art of making the best of it—I found it a very difficult study for me at this time. I found then that my past troubles, my little gnat-bites of distress, were nothing after all, now the great sorrow loomed before me, and there was no shutting it out. George was going away, and that one stern fact was omnipresent, and not to be escaped from.

Still, I *did* bear up after my fashion, and it is a consolation to me even now to think that George knew not the depth of my grief, believed in my false smiles, and fancied I was

forgetting the present in a bright, far-away future. I shed few tears in his presence; my "good cries" were all to myself when I was packing his trunks, and the room-door was double-locked on my solitude. But if I deceived George, he, playing the same part but more clumsily, did not blind my eyes for an instant; I could read all that he felt on his honest old face, and see all that he wished to conceal. More than once the post that had been offered to him, and his resolutions concerning it, trembled in the balance and it was only by being a greater hypocrite than usual that I managed to save the scales from turning in my favour. Yes, in my favour, for I knew what the next year, the next two years, mayhap, would be to me; what a blank ever before me; what a dark wall of cloud hemming me round, and only crossed now and then by the flash of uncertainty as to his health or his life — the quick, awful flash, which in a second might blast every hope we had formed, when we were together and happy.

Oh! men and women, fellow-workers on this world of ours, don't give way to despair and grow maudlin over little sorrows, or if the great ones come hereafter they will crush you. Do you know what your small griefs are to one who has really suffered and been patient?—simply contemptible. Do you know that it is for you to be thankful that the snow-flakes of disappointment only fall to your share, and the avalanche thunders by you, turned aside by the Great Hand!

My consolation in my grief, and it was not a small grief, was that it might have been worse—that there was much to be grateful for—little, putting selfishness aside, at which to despair. From our little house in the Kingsland Road, draw but a circle a few hundred yards in circumference, and how many women within it were left mourning for trouble greater than my own?—how many whose husbands were going on a longer journey, for a longer period, with no hope at all for guiding star; with no thought beyond the morrow, and with no

care—for there are such worldlings of the earth, earthy—for those left behind ; how many whose husbands had departed on a journey, the end of which is the wisely-hidden mystery that had its birth with Abel !

I was thankful that the bustle of preparation, the wear and tear of business, kept George busy from morning till night, and did not leave him much time to think of our separation. There was a great deal to do, and many visits to pay to a snuff-dried old Russian in Mincing Lane, from whom George received orders and money on account, and who didn't look worth a sixpence in the world.

“If I had opened the door to him in the Kingsland Road, my dear,” said Keldon to me, one day, “I should have stopped his first speech with, ‘We don't want any!’”

These little comments on passing events—events hurrying by and tending to one end—helped to divert George's mind ; and as the days grew less, I was thankful to see

what we women call "worry" increase in proportion, despite the assistance Andrew was to my husband.

Yes, brother Andrew, my once selfish brother, set aside his opera, forgot his fear of the streets, and worked hard for my husband; went half-a-dozen times a-day to the works where the telegraph wire, or a portion of it, was being constructed under Keldon's supervision, received Keldon's orders, and hurried off to execute them. Brother Andrew saw deeper into my sad thoughts than my husband; less busy than he, there was opportunity to study me more, and it was only when George was present that my brightest looks came uppermost. Andrew was very kind and thoughtful, too—came out of the shell of his reserve when we were together, and talked of anything and everything that he thought would afford me the faintest chance of amusement. So the days went on, till everything was ready; till the wire was shipped and the ship was ready to spread its wings and away! So the days went by, melted into weeks and drifted

down the stream of Time, till two alone were left to us; two days to be spent together—strange evanescent days, which were to vanish like a dream, and the like of which might never come again!

On the first day he took me to the Bank; there was no necessity for my presence there, but he would not have me a moment out of his sight during those last two days. At the Bank he transferred all his property to me—had it entered as my own in the great bank books.

"We can't tell what may happen, my girl," said he; "you may have need of the money before I return; my remittances may miss fire, get blocked up in Baltic ice, or spilt out of a Russian post-bag, there's no telling."

He tried to make a jest of his forethought, reminded me of our old controversy concerning the money, and said, laughingly, he had got his way at last, and it was all mine—he could not touch a penny of it! Walking slowly home again, midst the bustle and roar of the Great City,

with myriads of money-seekers, pleasure-seekers streaming by, he spoke of two things that had been before him midst all his preparation for departure; two possible events which might occur.

"I have a couple of things to get over very briefly, Barbara," said he; "just to allude to, and to drop. One is a will of mine, in my drawer upstairs. You have no old woman's superstition about will-making?"

"No," replied I, pressing his arm.

"I thought it was not the most foolish thing to do before I started, although there is not much to leave you, my girl, now you have collared all the money in the Bank! There's the insurance on my life."

"What, dear?"

"Oh! my valuable life has been insured three weeks at least, and so, that I don't go out of Europe, everything is satisfactory and comfortable. I am rather afraid though," with great gravity, "that it's a bad speculation."

I did not understand him.

"Because the doctor fell into raptures over my constitution, which he said was next door to cast-iron; and if I go paying away money every year till doomsday, where's the pull, my dear?"

"Oh! George, don't talk like that."

"Subject postponed *sine die*, as the big-wigs say," remarked George, "and subject No. 2 brought in neck and heels. It's no more cheerful than No. 1, my dear, but I must say it."

"I am all attention."

"There's a brother of yours will be left at home as guardian; a brother who has seen the world, found it full of temptation, and gone head first into it—the head being the weakest part, and the weakest part always the first to give way," continued he; "you and I, my dear, may have our faith in Andrew, but we cannot tell what lies in wait for him, or what temptation may arise again and swamp him! Do you understand me, dear?"

"Yes."

"Well, then, if—let us hope it's an *if* a

very long way off, and next door to impossible—if he should give way, Barbara, will you go back to Jersey, you and our *two* little ones, and wait my coming there? There will be nothing to remain in London for *then*, you will be happier in the farm at St. Brelade.”

I made the required promise, and George rose in spirits several degrees. I remember nothing more of that day—it is dream-land. I have a vague consciousness of being ever at his side; of strolling about our little garden, which had fallen of late into disorder; of sitting silently together in the parlour listening, or affecting to listen, to the choice parts of “the opera,” which Andrew played over to amuse us in the dusk of evening. I have a misty remembrance of George nursing our boy more than usual, and of his relieving the dullness of the evening by one or two dreary jokes, at which he only laughed himself—and a very sepulchral kind of laugh it was. The next day was a little more real—sped on more rapidly towards the time when the good-bye that

I dreaded *must* be said. In the course of the day arrived two friends, to say farewell to George, and bid him God-speed on his journey—two gentlemen, who arrived within five minutes of each other. I was glad that my brother had gone down to the ship at Gravesend that day, with a message from George.

“Ah! my co-executor, how is the world treating you?” asked Ernest Tresdaile of his cousin, Barnaby.

“Middling, sir, middling,” with his easy laugh, “not so well as I deserve, considering what I have done for it.”

Mr. Barnaby Tresdaile did not appear to be suffering from the world's indifference; he was brisk and lively, and was evidently increasing in width and rotundity. Mr. Ernest, too, was all spirit and bustle, and his quick little eyes seemed having quite a dance to themselves, behind the spectacles. My first inquiry was of Alice—was she well?

“Still in Devonshire,” Ernest replied, “but as strong and well as ever.”

“I am so glad to hear it,” I said.

"Her little romantic troubles have taken the nonsense out of her, Mrs. Keldon, and formed her character;" said he, "she's quite the woman now, as quiet and ladylike as—as Miss Hollingston."

"Are they together?"

"Yes, I managed it at last," replied Ernest, with an audible chuckle; "I found Miss Hollingston out, preyed upon her sympathies, and enlarged upon Alice's ailments, till she broke from her reserve, like powder out of a bomb-shell. She makes the best of companions; she's like a sister to Alice; very kind and gentle with her, puts up with all her little fits of petulance, and never returns her a cross word—a wonderful young woman!"

I did not ask Ernest Tresdaile whether Alice's little fits of petulance were executed in the quiet and ladylike manner he had alluded to a moment since—I merely expressed my satisfaction at hearing Miss Hollingston was Alice's companion, smiling to myself at the warmth with which the matter-of-fact Ernest had spoken of that lady.

I was woman enough also to endeavour to sound the heart of the practical young man, and discover if any impression had been made in that fossilized quarter.

"For a time Alice should mix with society, Mr. Tresdaile."

"Certainly," was the reply; "oh! we have made a host of new friends."

"And Miss Hollingston, too, so calculated as she is to adorn society; I hope she does not stay at home too much, she was very dull and low-spirited as my neighbour."

"She accompanies Alice, of course."

"With her accomplishments—with that stamp of a real lady in her movements—I have no doubt the better days will return to her, and she will find a rich young husband to protect her."

"Eh?"

"Torquay has many fashionable visitors?"

"Miss Hollingston has had enough of the fashionable world, I should think," said Ernest, vigorously; "she wasn't half the girl she is when that capricious, stuck-

up, insolent whirligig engulfed her — at least," he added; "I've heard so, for it's no business of mine. Keldon, you're off to Russia?"

"Yes."

"I knew you'd turn up a trump-card some day," said Ernest; "it would have been odd, if with all your extraordinary thoughts you had remained droning on for ever and ever. I say, Barnaby, you and I had better have speculated in George Keldon's ideas, and made a Company out of one or two of them, eh?"

"By Jove, sir, yes!" cried Barnaby, heartily.

"The Virginian Tobacco Association would not have beaten the one we might have formed," said Ernest.

"The Virginian Tobacco Association be damned!" ejaculated Barnaby; "beg pardon, Mrs. Keldon," he added, hastily; "I forgot your presence for the moment, and remembered only my own bewildered self."

"What, don't the Association pay after all?" asked Ernest.

"It pays and it doesn't pay," said Barnaby enigmatically; "it makes a profit and it doesn't, its accounts are admirably kept, and there's no making them out; it's managed with economy, and the devil knows where the money's going to; it's solvent and insolvent, it's rising fast and it's going to smash!"

"Very lucidly explained," said Ernest, drily.

"My dear sir, it defies explanation," replied Barnaby; "neither Bart., nor I, nor the Board of Directors, could give it you. It's one gigantic and inextricable tangle!"

"Whose fault is that?"

"Everybody's."

"But you are not going to wind it up?"

"Wind it up, sir!" exclaimed Barnaby, indignantly; "we are going to borrow fifteen thousand pounds, and open twenty-six branch establishments! It's rising fast, sir, or, as before observed, going to smash; I can't exactly tell which—and as it is impossible to help it, I don't care. What

is to be, must be. I've done my best, and if Fate does its worst, why," with quite a French shrug of the shoulders, "I shan't fret about it!"

The character of Barnaby Tresdaile still remained unaltered. As he stepped from poverty to fortune with easy nonchalance, so would he step composedly back to obscurity, and be never the worse for the change.

"Talking of the Association," said Barnaby, drawing from his pocket a heavy bundle of papers; "reminds me of a commission, which I am sure you will execute for me, Keldon."

"I'm not so sure about it myself," replied Keldon, glancing at the papers; "especially if they are prospectuses."

"They *are* prospectuses of THE Association," said Barnaby, loftily; "they offer every inducement to shareholders. Every advantage that has ever been introduced into a prospectus will be found here—there is nothing to find fault with."

"I don't find fault with the prospectus,"

returned Keldon; "but as you can't say much for the speculation yourself, I don't see why I should."

"My dear fellow, I'll say anything!"

"I shan't!"

"If I have said anything prejudicial to the interests of the Association, I retract the expression; if I have in the heat of discussion anathematized the Association, I beg that may apply to the trouble and hard work it causes me, not to any inauspicious state of its affairs. My dear Keldon, you must not disappoint me," thrusting the bundle in his hands.

"Well, they shall go to Russia, at all events."

"When you are well up in the Russian language, Keldon, you will be able to admire the faithfulness of the translation."

"What, are these in Russian!" exclaimed Keldon.

"Yes, sir; what on earth would be the good of them in English?"

"Bravo, Barnaby!" cried Ernest; "as quick to take advantage of an opportunity as ever!"

Barnaby looked pleased at this compliment to his shrewdness.

"Heaven has been merciful to me, and not addled my wits by prosperity," he said. "I meet a friend in the City, who tells me he is going to Russia; I get a translation of my prospectus into the Russian gibberish immediately — I have five thousand copies made into a small parcel, and sent down in his name to his ship at Gravesend, and I bring a few here for my friend to distribute on board or immediately on landing."

"Like the fellows with the tracts, 'Are you a sinner?' or, Solomon and Son's light division of ragamuffins. All right, Barnaby."

"Nothing undignified, for the company's sake," said Barnaby, "I only ask you, as a friend and relation, to encourage the topic of England; to speak up for your country, its wealth, its vast speculations—to insinuate by degrees a prospectus before them."

"If anybody asks me for a prospectus,

"I'll give it him," was Keldon's evasive reply; "I cannot promise any more at present; it is just likely, Barnaby, that I may be busy, and want some time to attend to my own affairs."

"Certainly—certainly."

"I wish you had asked me to do something for yourself," said Keldon; "something as a set-off against the old times when you used to drop in at Blackman's Gardens, and cheer me up over my work."

"This is for myself; Bart. knows nothing of it—don't even know you are going to Russia."

"Why, the *Times* stated who had been appointed to the post of superintendent—or how should I have known it?" said Ernest.

"Bart. only reads the *Christian Cabinet*," replied Barnaby.

There was a laugh from Ernest and my husband, the former of whom essayed to turn the conversation, and succeeded not till the sanguine Barnaby had told us how

a few more thousand shares would make the fortune of the Association; and what a respect foreigners had for any speculation on a large scale.

After Barnaby had bidden George good-bye, he came back again to say that George had better confine the issue of propectuses to capitalists, men who had money to spare, and were fond of speculation—not any poor devil with a few roubles, he didn't want that exactly; and then away he went, confident in the Russian nation doing a great deal for the Virginian Tobacco Association. Ernest, after learning Andrew was likely to be absent till the evening, stayed some hours with us talking of Keldon's prospects and their brightness, and of the loss I was shortly to sustain.

"We shall be in London soon—you will come and see Alice?"

"Yes."

"Had things been different," said he, vaguely, "we might have taken care of you till Keldon came home with his laurels; if things should turn out different—"

"She will return to her father," interrupted Keldon. "Many thanks to you, cousin, but there is always something wrong to upset people in your family, and my wife had better not get mixed up any more in your muddles."

"What is to muddle us now, friend?"

"Nothing, I hope; but there is no telling."

No telling, indeed! No telling even, despite George's precaution, how the force of events might bear me into the current, and set me playing my part again with all the old faces!

Ernest Tresdaile, going away that afternoon before the sun went down, standing at the door, shaking George's hands in his and reiterating his best wishes, was destined to meet one he had been anxious to avoid. Andrew recognized him on the instant, and the cowed look, full of the shame that was the legacy bequeathed him by his sin, settled on his face. Bending his eyes to the ground he advanced, and Ernest turned and met him. Andrew would have passed in silence,

had not Ernest, after some little hesitation, said :—

“Good day, sir.”

“Good day, Mr. Tresdaile,” was the reply of Andrew, still looking on the ground; “I hope all are well?”

“Yes, all.”

No more words were exchanged, and Andrew passed into the house.

“Still steady?” said Ernest to us.

“Yes—very steady.”

“Don’t build too much upon him,” said he to me, “remember my former warning, for your own sake.”

“Oh! but I have hopes now!”

“Then your troubles are not over.”

And, with this lugubrious prophecy, Ernest Tresdaile went his way.


CHAPTER IV.

ANDREW'S CHARGE.

THE next day—the day of parting. Have we not all experienced its effects in a degree, more or less?—is there a happy one amongst my readers, who has never said ‘good bye,’ and with whom the great home circle is still an undivided chain?

Let me hurry on and close this stage of my career wherein prosperity began, and my husband went away and left me miserable. To think of it now is to make me miserable still!

When I awoke that morning I found Keldon had already risen, and the fear that



he had taken flight, and spared me the pain of parting, took the colour from my cheeks, and sent me hastening down stairs with a palpitating heart. I found my husband in the garden, however, striding round and round the little path at a headlong pace, smashing the box edging recklessly, and swinging his arms at his side in a very insane manner.

"Why, George, you are not walking for a wager," said I, in my best style; "not a thousand miles in a thousand hours, is it?"

"No, a thousand thoughts in half a minute, and there's no mastering of them, girl," said he; "out of the way, Barbara, and let me get my head cool somehow!"

"But this is an impracticable method, dear."

"You're right," said he, stopping; "where's Andrew — where's the breakfast — what's o'clock?"

Having replied to these questions, he followed me into the parlour, where Andrew awaited us. After nodding to my brother, he took his usual seat, and watched me pour

out the coffee in silence. When the breakfast cup was before him he stirred away at his coffee with the same rotatory violence that he had gone round the garden, and when Andrew handed the bread and butter to him, he pushed the plate away again, and sent two slices into Andrew's lap.

"It's no good shoving that stuff this way," said he, roughly, "and it's no good, Barbara," in a gentle tone, "looking like that, for it's only persuading me to choke myself before I start! Why don't *you* eat?"

"Presently, dear."

"I have been trying to do this parting business very coolly and gracefully," said Keldon, "but I have begun to make a mess of it, and I may as well go on. I have been thinking, too, how we had better say good-bye, and where."

"Why—"

"Wait a moment," said Keldon, interrupting me, "this is my last hour, and Barbara, girl, I must have my own way—you must let me have it!"

"I will not oppose your wishes, George—what are they?"

"To say good-bye here,—in this house. I would rather part here, where we have been so happy, girl; have your last look, your last kiss associated with the home! I don't know that I may not make a scene of it, and I'd rather not at a railway station, with a lot of sniggering humbugs round me; rather not at Gravesend go blubbering over the decks, and all the Russian sailors wondering what's the matter. Here's the place!"

"Very well," said I, sadly, for I had made up my mind to proceed to Gravesend with him, and it was a disappointment to part till it was absolutely necessary. But it was his wish, and it was my duty to respect it.

The apology for a breakfast being ended, Andrew left us together to talk over our future for the last time. It was the old story; how happy we should be one day, and how that future happiness would make amends for all the bitterness of now! The old, old story which those who love and have to part say every day; which fades away, or changes, or is forgotten by weak hearts, but which, with others more loving

and of greater faith, comes true sometimes, thank God! It was time to go away at last; the cab was at the door, and we were side by side and lingering yet. I had tried to be very firm till that cab drew up before the house, but when the cabman and the small maid were bumping about the passage with the boxes, I gave way and sobbed upon his breast. He stood very silent for some moments, with his arms tightening round me, then he said, hoarsely:—

“Where’s Andrew—I want to speak to him?”

Andrew came in at this moment.

“Look here, man,” cried my husband, “you must take care of her—she is your charge. Your charge,” he added, sternly, “left by me in trust! Don’t forget that, or God knows, there’ll be a reckoning between us!”

“Do you doubt me, Keldon?”

“You have doubted yourself before now, and I trust you with what I hold most precious in this life! Bloyce, remember *your* charge,—to watch over, shield from harm, keep from despairing.”

"She is something more to live for—God desert me for ever when I play her false!"

"I witness that oath!" answered Keldon, quickly.

They wrung each other's hands, and then he turned to me again and kissed me passionately; ran upstairs and woke his boy, brought him down with him, kissed him, and put him in my arms.

"There, he will keep your mind busy for a time," said Keldon; "don't fret about my going away, or cry like rain for nothing. Almost nothing, you know!—God bless you! Take care of her, Bloyce, take care of her!"

And he darted away, and I saw him no more.



BOOK VI.

"I was a fool, too rash, and quite mistaken
In what I thought would have succeeded best."
MILTON.

"Violets and primroses lie under thorns
Often as asps and adders; and we find
The unexpected often as the expected,
The pleasant as the hideous."
LANDOR.

CHAPTER I.

"THE ONE CHANCE."

SIX months since George Keldon went away to Russia, entrusting me to Andrew's care. Six months since Andrew accepted the charge, and proud of the confidence placed in him, became more earnest, careful, gentle. So great a change from the past indifference and selfishness, from the era less remote, when every hope seemed lost, that his brighter and more manly looks made some amends for the absence of my husband. Confident in his power to work his way, there were still times—few and far between, though — when I

feared he might give up the struggle, and that some great trouble, disappointment, would cast him back to his old reckless life.

Ernest Tresdaile's warning was not lightly to be cast aside. "It is impossible to last!" rang often in my ears, as words of ill-omen will ring in our memories long after the prophets have been lost to us.

My fears were generally the strongest when Andrew was the most sanguine; when he began castle-building I could but remember his past day-dreams of fortune, and what they had ended in. Still better castle-building—be the fabric of the most airy material — than cowering from the daylight, and giving up all effort. He built his castles by the fireside, now; and the world or the devil did not tempt him from his duty. His ambitions were legitimate, and if they failed him, there would be no remorse to embitter disappointment, let the blow fall never so heavy.

I have said six months had passed; winter had come again; a full year since

our home was Andrew's, and his was a household face that would have wrung my heart to miss. George the second toddled about the room now, and gave evidence of being "father's boy," by a spirit of investigation, carried at times to an extent rather fatiguing to the mother.

Upstairs in the nursery, was sleeping his small brother, (called Andrew, after his godfather), a wee, red-faced infant, with a Tresdaile cast of countenance, only two months old and wonderfully observant. As his admiring mother I feel bound to record that fact, for the benefit of posterity.

The nursery was fitted up again; the nursemaid had returned; heavy remittances came regularly from Russia, with my dear husband's constant letters—letters full of anxiety about me, and of consolation, too, for he was well, and his work was progressing to everybody's satisfaction; full of inquiry concerning the little ones—were they well?—of Andrew, was he steady?

The large sums of money forwarded

by Keldon were paid into the Bank of England—it was time enough to be “great folks” when he came back from his travels, and could enjoy the “better days” with me. Besides, this stroke of fortune might be only a stroke; and if there were rainy days in store, why there was no harm in preparing for them. So I lived in homely fashion in the Kingsland Road, and the chief luxury I indulged in was a nursery-maid, who relieved guard at times when the children were more than usually boisterous.

It was singular at this time to detect in Andrew an amount of perseverance new to his character—the rebuffs which he met in conveying his opera into proper channels did not dispirit him, only set him more earnestly to work in new directions.

“Keldon worked for many years before the lucky hour came,” said he to me; “with such an example to profit by, I need not give way.”

“How you have changed, dear!”

"For the better, I hope, Barbara?" he asked.

"Yes—for the better!"

"Three years ago, the opera would have gone behind the fire, and the first 'declined with thanks,' would have made me disgusted with the profession and all connected with it. Now, you see, my energy don't fail me."

"And if—we may as well look to the dark side of the picture for a moment, Andrew—if this great task of yours should never find a patron?"

"I shall remember the failures of my brother-in-law, and how they never daunted him. But—"

He paused.

"Go on, Andrew."

"But if the opera be played some day and prove a failure; if the fair trial be given me, and I am condemned—then I *must* sink!"

"I do not see the force of that '*must*.'"

"I shall have been found guilty! I shall know that distinction in the musical profession is for ever denied me."

"Is that taking an example from my husband, Andrew?"

"I have noticed that if your husband fails in one scheme, he turns to another wholly different—he does not prosecute the same."

"And cannot you find other pursuits?"

"I have only one scheme in my head—it is my single chance of getting on in the world. Let it fail, and there is nothing to take refuge in, or turn my hand to."

"But George—"

"Is a man of genius, Barbara, gifted with more natural knowledge, more penetration, more mechanical skill than I have ever known. Such men as he flash across us once or twice a century, and make the land they live in famous—and he will be a great and famous man, I am sure of it. You must not draw an odious comparison between George Keldon and your brother."

This was the first time Andrew had expressed an opinion on my husband. In past times he had begrudged praise, and

envied the good words that fell to another's share ; but he had altered now, and it was pleasant to hear him speak thus warmly of my George. I was sorry however, that I had suggested the thought of the opera being an unfortunate speculation, although I had spoken with the best of motives. ' I had cast a shadow on his thoughts ; set him thinking on what might be, but not preparing for it. I did my best to weaken the impression I had made, turned from the dark side and looked again to the bright !

Theatres, operatic managers, musical critics were not a quarter exhausted, and Andrew was sufficiently known in the musical world to command a fair share of attention. I would not recommend an amateur to begin at an opera, or a " Minor minstrel " at a five act tragedy, if he ever wish the great guns to look at it—it is hard enough work for those who have already a name.

Andrew spent a great deal of his time writing letters to, and calling upon, the " Profession,"—neglected to a certain extent his ballads, his dance-music, and pupils

—his pupils were all of the masculine gender! He was still thin and pale, and his new-born energy hardly seemed to agree with his constitution, though he never complained, or acknowledged that he was ill.

There began a stir in London at this time about English operas; society that had turned up its nose at it for many long seasons, and rhapsodized over what was foreign and dull, began to smile a little, and to fancy there might be some native talent worth encouraging, after all. English singers came into request, English composers began to be patronized, and those who had gone into mourning for England's musical decadence folded their hat-bands and weepers, took the other side of the question, and told everybody how they had prophesied the good time coming—oh, years ago!

If Barnaby Tresdaile had had any money to spare at this period—and he had *not*—he would have started an English Opera Company (Limited).

Fortunately for Andrew, although unfortunately for the parties engaged, two

rival managers took to operatics and looked round for novelties; Andrew's opera was put in a reader's hands, submitted to the prima-donna, who only played in what she liked and was addicted to sore throats when anything displeased her; sent on a secret mission with a heavy fee, which Andrew paid to a kind of musical surveyor who wrote for the papers and could damn everything; was finally, and under certain conditions, ACCEPTED!

It was a proud day for Andrew, and his sanguine nature leaped to the skies after that, and lived only in cloud-land. It would succeed now, Barbara, my dear, he was sure it would succeed, and in the new life which it opened to him, farewell for ever to the past follies! What did it matter about conditions?—though there was to be no money down, he was to have five hundred pounds if it pleased the public, and he was as sure of that sum as if it were already in his pocket! Had not the tenor, the great tenor, shaken him by the hand and said it was a

master-piece—and surely he ought to know, who better than he?

And that five hundred pounds, how nobly it was to be expended! In so good a cause—strictly speaking in so just a cause—surely an opera must succeed!

“George and you will not object to my debt hanging over a bit,” said he, as though a cheque for five hundred pounds had recently been presented him by a grateful manager; “I have a wish to lay my money out in another direction.”

“Any direction that will benefit yourself, Andrew, will please us.”

He coloured.

“It may appear surprising, but I haven’t thought of myself. I am trying as much as I can to keep that important personage in the back-ground.”

“May I ask what you intend to do with the money, supposing you are fortunate enough to see your opera successful?”

“Who has a greater right to ask?” he rejoined.

It was with some difficulty he began to

explain though, and the colour burnt into his face and settled there till the conclusion of his statement.

“ I believe, Barbara, that to a certain extent, the ruin—that is the utter ruin—of the Hollingstons lies at my door; and no excuse of having done it for the best, or having fallen with them, satisfies me now. I knew the mental weakness of Colonel Hollingston, and was the first to profit by it; when he was on the verge of bankruptcy, and but a few thousands remained to him from the wreck of his property, I led him on to speculate his money with my own in a mad scheme, dishonourable to both of us,—more dishonourable to me, for I did my best to prove it fair dealing to my partner. Wanting money to add to mine, certain of success—for I was a sanguine fool then!—I embarked the remnant of his fortune with all that I had gained in my career of betting, and lost the whole! Now, Barbara, some time hence there will be five hundred pounds in my hands—”

“ Andrew, Andrew! ”

"Well, probably there will," he corrected ;
"and that sum, though it will not indemnify Miss Hollingston for her losses, will to some extent be a reparation for my act, and may be—will be of great service to her. Oh ! Barbara, it will be a proud day, when the first opportunity of doing a good action is offered me."

"But do you think Miss Hollingston will accept the money ?"

"She shall not know from whom it comes. When I have ascertained her address, it shall be sent to her anonymously, as an old debt due to her father. Barbara, there will be no difficulty in discovering her address ?"

"No, I think not."

I had not told him how strangely events had come to pass ; how the two whom he had loved were together as mistress and companion—how the proud Miss Hollingston of old time, who had looked disparagingly upon my position in society, had descended to it herself with a chastened spirit and a better heart. As there had been no occasion to allude to it six months

ago, so there remained less need now to disclose the changes time had brought. Always a painful subject, it was better till the hour of action came, to keep the veil before it.

From that day I looked forward to the opera's success as the great turning-point in my brother's life. I dreaded what might follow disappointment; he was sinking self so much, and struggling so hard towards one noble action — as if no chance lay beyond that one!—that it was hard, even cruel, to reason with him calmly. As the past despair in one so young was unnatural, so the eager belief in coming success was equally strange and artificial—for in his heart there rested not long the shadow of a doubt. I believe, too, there were other hopes to take their rise from the day of his success as a composer; hopes that one fair girl who had been deceived in him, and whose life had been darkened by his deeds, would think better of him, and believe he was not wholly bad—nay, that he was striving to atone for all the evil days.

There were times, too, when with a sinking heart I believed it might be really his last chance — that the lamp was burning slowly, surely to the end, and that an hour to hope anew would never come again.

Was it wrong to pray for that opera's success? I cannot tell. God knows it was not for the name or the money it might bring him — only for the sake of one to whom success might be life, true atonement.

So the opera was accepted; that was one grand step,—and the first step is always the most difficult.

Did it matter much if there were no talk of its production, that it was not yet in rehearsal, though the spring was advancing and time was scoring fast into the New Year? If anticipation be three-fourths of the pleasure of most things, what a deal of happiness had fallen to my present lot, despite my feeling so very dull at times!

Looking forward to Andrew's success; counting the months that had to drift by before my husband was at my side again,

and assured that he was well; knowing health was with my children and myself—why not even with Andrew, he never complained!—there was little cause for sorrow in our house in Kingsland Road.

CHAPTER II.

THE NEW ALICE.

DURING the past six months alluded to in my last chapter, and in the time succeeding that period, ending with the acceptance of my brother's opera, I had heard but once of Alice. She had not returned to London, despite Ernest's past assurance of her health; and when the news first came concerning her, four months after Keldon's departure to Russia, I learned she was travelling on the Continent with her brother and Miss Hollingston.

She wrote to me herself, and the letter, in her own dear handwriting, was brought

to me when I lay ill upstairs with a little baby's face beside me. It was neither a long nor a satisfactory epistle, though it assured me of her health and love for me; though it spoke of meeting again, and the pleasure that meeting would give her. It was to a certain extent satirical, and the few remarks on foreign places were couched in an easy yet acrimonious style, common enough in some letters, but very new in hers. It was a fine-lady epistle, elegantly written, carefully worded and punctuated, and though it evinced affection for me, I missed the ring of the old light spirit as prominent in all she wrote, as in all she said and did, and missing it, I could not believe that she was happy.

When Andrew was beginning to think it time the opera was taken in hand, a second letter with news of Alice, came to Kingsland Road. It bore the Paris post-mark, and was written by Ernest Tresdaile—and a true spider-like, higgledy-piggledy letter it was, dashed at with a skewer, and finished off with a hair-brush.

"Paris, March 18th, 18—.

"MY DEAR MRS. KELDON,—England ho!—

"At Stamford Street on Tuesday. All well!

"Will you kindly look in on Wednesday,

"and cheer up the wanderers? I am sure

"it will please Alice very much to see you.

"Sincerely yours,

"ERNEST TRESDAILE."

There was something to reflect upon in these few lines; the remark that he was sure it would please Alice very much to see me, implied that Alice had not at least been consulted on the matter before the missive was dispatched. However, men will write blundering letters in the hurry of business, and I was too anxious to see Alice to stand much upon ceremony, and perhaps I was as certain as Ernest that his sister would not be sorry to meet me. On the evening of the Tuesday I communicated my intentions to Andrew—mentioned, for the first time directly, the name of Alice Tresdaile.

"I am going to see Miss Tresdaile to-morrow, Andrew."

"Indeed," said he, in a low voice, "is she in town?"

"I believe she is by this time."

"Well?"

"Yes,—quite well."

"Married?"

"No."

He put no more questions to me; he took up a book from a side-table, and opening it at random, plunged at once into its contents.

On the Wednesday afternoon I found myself again in the drawing-room of the old house in Stamford Street; sitting there alone, and waiting for Alice. There was no old-fashioned furniture in the room now, and the carpet that had seen better days had vanished after the furniture;—everything was new and in good taste, befitting the establishment of a gentleman of property.

The opening of the door made my heart beat a little, though it was only Miss Holmington who entered.

"My dear Mrs. Keldon, I was sure many hours would not pass before we welcomed

you in Stamford Street;" she said, taking for a moment both my hands in her's.

"Was not Alice sure then?" I asked.

"Alice thought you might call to see her one day next week, or the week after that—at least she feigned to think so," said Miss Hollingston, with a smile that had a good deal of sadness in it.

"Has Alice altered so much, then?"

"Her heart is as full of warmth and love as ever, but,"—added Miss Hollingston, after a pause, "she does not show that heart so often."

"Do any of us, when the romance of our girlhood sobers down?"

"No," answered the companion, thoughtfully.

"Is Alice aware that her brother Ernest has written to me, Miss Hollingston?"

"Mr. Tresdaile told us this morning that he had dropped a hurried line, informing you of our return."

I did not tell Miss Hollingston that he had appointed Wednesday for my visit, though I could not help smiling at that

gentleman's Machiavelian policy, even in the writing of a note, which required no policy at all. He was anxious that I should fly to Alice on the first day of her return, and please his sister by my earnestness to see her; but he had appointed the day for me, and left Alice to be taken by surprise at my promptitude. It would have been more natural to have left me to my own impulse, which would have taken me to his sister's side just as speedily; but, with all his honesty and good feeling, it was not in his Tresdaile nature to be exactly straightforward. He must be artful, even in his affectionate solicitude.

"I need not ask you, Mrs. Keldon, to talk more of the future than the past to Alice—to pass lightly by all those old topics which revive associations painful to dwell upon."

"Miss Hollingston may trust in my discretion."

"Yes, yes; but Alice's manner may deceive you," explained Miss Hollingston; "Alice may talk of the past very coolly

and composedly to all appearance, but—appearances are deceptive.”

“I understand you, Miss Hollingston.”

“Her brother Ernest, more thoughtless, will talk of the past, and Alice’s self-command deceives him.”

“Is there anything that Alice still regrets, or from which she has not recovered?”

“She regrets not her loss of faith in him who might have been her husband, and is only too glad that the awakening from her folly came in time to save her,” was Miss Hollingston’s response; “but it is difficult to say from what she has recovered. From her romantic passion she is exempt, naturally enough—but the knowledge of how she was schemed and bartered for has left its wounds which are healing slowly as her nature hardens.”

“Is it wise to let that nature harden, do you think?”

“Her’s was a nature too impulsive, sensitive, unworldly.”

“Even so; but I would not see her more

worldly—only more prudent, and a little less impulsive. I should be sorry to see that warm-hearted young girl, become the machine of form and ceremony that the world can make her.”

“It is best.”

“You are her worst friend and adviser, if you think so.”

“Mrs. Keldon, you do not know what that poor girl has suffered—that there is no choice between a helpless, dejected, miserable woman, and the woman of the world you despise so much.”

“Oh, don't say that!”

“God forbid that I should seek to mould her character—I, so erring and so faulty; I am but a passive witness to a great reaction. I see she becomes colder, graver, and more sceptical, but I see the colour back upon her cheek; I see that health returns, and, knowing what her sufferings have been, it is cruel to regret it.”

“You do not advise her, then, to become the fine lady of no feelings, like—like—”

“The daughter of Colonel Hollingston,

at Hastings," she said, with a smile; "no, Mrs. Keldon, I cannot recommend that as a happy state of being. At the worst this may be with Alice but an intermediate state, from which she will pass to something higher, better."

A light tap at the door, followed by the entrance of her who had formed the subject of our conversation.

"May I come in?—I have knocked twice humbly for admission, and received no answer?"

"My dear, dear Alice!"

She had entered in a stately manner, looked, I fancied, from Miss Hollingston to me rather suspiciously, as she stood a few paces from the door, but she melted at once when I flew towards her and strained her in my arms. She was not all the woman of the world yet; she might learn in time to hide her heart, or resist its honest promptings, but it would never turn to stone!

"My Barbara!" said she, holding me at arm's length, at last, and earnestly regarding me, "what a little matron you have grown

—what a happy, contented, dear old face your's is ! ”

“ Thank you, Alice, for the compliment. I am as happy and contented as a poor lady can be, whose husband has run away to Russia ; I don't let the impossible, or the unalterable, prey on my mind much.”

“ And that is the secret of true happiness—you are right, Barbara. And your faithful, clever, persevering husband, is he well ?—and your little boy and the baby ? ”

“ All well, thank God.”

“ You should have brought the baby with you, and introduced me to it—what is its name, Barbara ? ”

I could not help a moment's hesitation before I answered—

“ Andrew.”

Perhaps the slight pause had put Alice on her guard, or perhaps she had learned to hear that name and to care nothing for it, for she answered quietly enough,

“ Andrew—ah ! after your brother, I suppose ! ”

“ Yes.”

"And now, dear, you have been surveying me very attentively—what is the result of your observation? Have I improved much?—do I look less of the foolish child you parted from fifteen months ago?"

And there was no flattery in the reply I gave her, for she *had* greatly improved; seemed to me to have changed suddenly from the light, vivacious girl, to the lovely, yet more sober woman. She appeared to have even increased in height; the figure was more rounded, and there was a depth and thoughtfulness in her large blue eyes, which gave quite a new expression to her face. There was little colour on the cheeks, but it was a relief to me to see thereon no trace of the care that had struck at her so heavily, and kept her weak so long.

"Everybody tells me what a lady I have become," said Alice, when we three young women were seated by the fireside; "as if I were going to remain a school-girl all my life! Society soon takes the girlish notions out of one's head."

"Society is frivolous enough at times," remarked Miss Hollingston.

"Ah! but what a false frivolity it is," replied Alice; "and how forced is its unnatural playfulness. Men and women of the world who have exhausted every youthful sentiment and generous impulse, aping the better natures they have lost for ever."

Alice said this very bitterly, and I could not help saying:—

"You are not fond of society?"

"Oh! it agrees with me," Alice carelessly replied; "there is excitement in it. I am flattered and petted by some of its members, and," with a little shudder, "it is unpleasant to be always alone with one's thoughts."

"Do you mix a great deal in this society then, Alice?" I asked.

"Yes, thanks to Ernest," replied Alice; "for my brother has made many friends, and he likes to gather them round him, or take me to see them. Wherever we have been, we have found society; and settling now in town again, Ernest purposes a gay life in the future. *Entre nous, ma chère*

Barbe, I am inclined to think Ernest is on the look out for a husband for me—he introduces me to so many eligible young men.”

“And have you seen one to your taste, Alice?” I asked, with a smile.

“Not exactly; but the young and the pretty can afford to wait, if they have six hundred a-year in their own right,” was the reply; “I shall bide my time, confident that my money will have charms of its own, when my face begins to look shady. Oh! there is no fear of me dying an old maid!”

Alice rattled on lightly and volubly, laughing very musically at times; and whether it were genuine humour, or only that flashy affectation of it which deceives so many, I found it impossible to resist joining in the laugh occasionally. Yet I was grieved, pained. Miss Hollingston was right, her nature was hardening; she talked of things and glanced at subjects in a manner very satirical, and almost at times heartless—it was not the Alice Tresdaile of the

past, that was a vision impossible to recall to the working-day life.

Later in the afternoon, Miss Hollingston left Alice and me together, and I could not resist the opportunity of inquiring if Alice were happy with her new companion.

"Do you doubt it, Barbara?" she asked, evasively.

"You must pardon me, dear; but despite all your raillery, your light manner, I cannot think you happy."

"Do you know any being happy in this world?" was the question hastily put—the question for which she would wait no answer, but went dashing on again; "if I am not a really happy being, it is not Miss Hollingston's fault; she is a friend to me, never resists my wishes by even an expostulation, is a gentle, graceful, kind companion—but, she is not the dear, aggravating, remonstrating Barbara Bloyce of old days!"

It was the spirit of the old days that brought her to my arms at that moment, her kisses to my cheek. It was the spirit of the old nature—the better nature!—that

bowed her to a position—oh! so well remembered—at my feet, where she sat looking at the fire, her white hands clasping mine. Was it again the Alice Tresdaile of the past?—a moment since and I had doubted it!

“You would scarcely believe it, my Barbara, but Miss Hollingston is the companion only; will not intrude upon my wishes, reason with my fitfulness, or thwart me in a single act. She talks eternally of her duty to her mistress, and will not remember the friend she has been to me, or from what she has saved me. You remember her at Hastings, Barbara?”

“Yes.”

“Has she not changed from that time? Must she not have struggled very hard to cast aside all her pride and haughtiness?”

“Adversity has made a better woman of her, Alice, but it has not destroyed her pride—only changed the form of it.”

“Is it the pride that apes humility, then?”

“No, for it is not tinged with hypocrisy

in the least—it is an honest pride, that enables her to bear her misfortunes; the pride that would resist a favour or turn from an advantage offered by her position as companion—the best of prides, my Alice.”

“You appear to have studied Miss Hollingston, Barbara,” said Alice; “more, I think those quiet black eyes of yours don’t let much escape you. Yours is a very dreadful acquaintance to cultivate.”

“Oh! I am a poor observer, Alice—often puzzled with a character. There are some beings I find easy to read, some who are enigmas to me all my life.”

“Am I an enigma?”

“You are beginning to puzzle me for the first time.”

“I am tossing on a sea which a heavy storm has left raging and restless. When the waters are still you may judge me—and I may know myself! But—” suddenly changing her tone, “we were talking of Miss Hollingston.”

“I would rather talk of you.”

“Oh! please don’t!” with a pretty affect-

ation of man, with something too of the new manner which I disliked and which was the result of the hardening process Miss Hollingston had spoken of: "the last person out of the room is always the subject of discussion in my circle."

"But we have discussed the merits of Miss Hollingston."

"But I have a secret to tell you—Miss Hollingston has declined an offer of marriage."

"Indeed—was not the suitor to her taste?"

"On the contrary, he is one whom she respects very much: a gentleman not very bad looking, far from a fool, a capitalist, a rich man, a young man, one who esteems her highly and is deeply attached to her."

"Do you mean—?"

"Mr. Ernest Tresdaile."

"And Miss Hollingston has refused him?"

"Yes, very quietly, and with a gentleness that softened poor Ernest's disappointment. She spoke of their difference of station, and of what the world would say if she ac-

cepted his offer; of her respect for him and his energy. She even implied that had he been a poor man, or she the Miss Hollingston of a few years since, she might have more seriously considered his offer; as it was, she had only to firmly and respectfully decline it. Of course, after such an offer, we were nearly losing Miss Hollingston, and it required all my powers of entreaty to induce her to remain in a house the head of which had offered her his hand. But Ernest has so convinced her that he returns to his old life and thoughts; that he will never, by word or look, pain her again, and that he can forget her and his love troubles—Ernest's love troubles!—in his business, that she remains the companion of his sister."

"It is a hard task to imagine Mr. Ernest Tresdaile in love."

Alice laughed.

"There was not much poetry or sentiment in his passion certainly," said she; "but Ernest really meant to be married, and he went to work in a sensible, business-like

manner. He told her how much he was worth, and how much pin-money he could allow—the fairest and the most fashionable way of wooing in the nineteenth century.”

The new Alice now—the vision of the old had gone!

“Before Miss Hollingston returns,” said she, after a pause, “I wish to ask a question of you—it may lead to others, it may not.”

“Whom does it concern?”

“Your brother.”

From her position at my feet she turned towards me two bright steady eyes that did not flinch from mine; that had within their depths something very cold and cutting, and in which no spark of a past affection glimmered.

“There is no one, save yourself, Barbara, but would misjudge my motives for the question,” said she, “and believe the embers of the old fire were smouldering in my heart. I need not tell you,” lightly touching her bosom, “that the ashes are black and cold within here, and that there

is no more power to revive their heat, than to restore the dead."

Looking into the grave face I could believe it. Hearing the strange, hard tones of her voice, it was impossible to doubt that the iron heel of shame had crushed to nothingness every tender flower that had bloomed round an altar reared in trusting times.

I waited for her question, resolving to be as brief as possible, and remembering the warning given by Miss Hollingston. It came very slowly and distinctly.

"What has become of *him*?"

"Has not Ernest told you?"

"No."

"He is living with me—he is beginning a new life!"

Her answer reminded me of her brother's, but it was more cruel.

"A new life!" she replied, with a scornful curl of the lip; "what, has *he* grown tired of sin and shame, and taken to repentance?"

I answered, very quietly:—

"Yes."

"I can believe in a man repenting of a crime perpetrated in the heat of passion ; but the contrition of a cool, deliberate schemer can but hide some deeper purpose than that from which the mask was torn away."

"Let us dismiss the subject, Alice," I replied ; "to both of us it is full of pain, and it is needless to prolong it. I believe there is no sin so black, or that has fastened itself so deep, but that there may come a time, God willing, when it can be cast away."

"Do you believe that there is no wrong so cruel or so humiliating, but that it may be forgiven, then ?"

"Certainly ; are we not taught to believe that forgiveness is a duty ?"

"A duty !" cried Alice, impatiently ; "ah ! let us change the subject."

"It was the new Alice after that. All the afternoon and evening, the vision of the old, the bright young face of years ago, never flitted back again. So new an

Alice, that it was possible to think the old some fair and gentle girl whom I had known and loved for many virtues which this one had not, and who was dead and buried !

Ernest came home and brought a friend with him ; a slim young gentleman of one or two and twenty, with a few hairs on his upper lip, that could just be seen sideways in a strong light, and offered the faintest apology for a moustache that I had ever seen in my life. He was a young man from the City, something to do with banks and stock-jobbing ; a man after Ernest's own heart. He was very polite to Miss Tresaile—paid her a great deal of attention, treated her like an old friend, and called her Miss Alice. Alice received him graciously, encouraged him in his silly nothings—and City people even deal in silly nothings after the Bank's shut — laughed, chatted and flirted in her best manner.

Ernest devoted himself to me, and I found him as brisk and shrewd as ever. There was no sign of the worm i' the bud preying on *his* damask cheek ; love had

not dimmed the sparkle of his little sharp eyes, or robbed him of half-an-ounce of his flesh — never was a man who looked less like a despairing lover. Ernest was not ashamed of his passion or its result, for he surprised me in no small degree by saying suddenly :—

“I suppose Alice has told you of the offer I made Miss Hollingston?”

It might have been an offer of a pair of gloves or a pound of butter, to judge by the tones of his voice.

“Yes, I hope she has not betrayed your confidence.”

“Not at all—I make no secret of it,” was the reply. “If Alice had not told you, I should have informed you myself, because,” sinking his voice lower, “I want your advice, Mrs. Keldon.”

“My advice?”

“A sensible woman like yourself understands these things better than a man of business, who has too much on his mind to study the female character in all its round-about ways.”

"Well, sir."

"Of course Miss Hollingston means what she says; if she had been very indignant and said 'No,' or giggled and said 'La,' I should have kept up the steam and come off with flying colours; but as she was uncommonly firm and frigid, I took up my hat and walked off. Now, I like Miss Hollingston very much; she's a sensible woman and a fine woman, and of course I mean to marry her yet, whatever I may have told her to the contrary; and if you will be kind enough to inform me, from your knowledge of Miss H., which is the likeliest method to 'put the comether' on her, as Paddy says, I should be extremely obliged to you."

"I must decline any advice on the subject, Mr. Ernest," I replied. "Lovers are best left to their own resources."

"Lovers—by Gad, how queer it sounds! Lovers! dear me, Mrs. Keldon, you are not very complimentary!"

"I compliment you on possessing more feeling, more heart than I believed."

He laughed again, a long rusty cackle—as though the idea of being a lover was too ridiculous to be got over in a hurry. Turning suddenly serious, he said:—

“But I want to ask you what you think of a plan of mine to turn Miss Hollingston into Mrs. Ernest Tresdaile—it is a capital idea, and I must swear you to secresy.”

But I was tired of Ernest Tresdaile's little plans, and affirmed rather positively that I was a bad hand at secrets, and should probably betray him to Alice or Miss Hollingston in an unguarded moment.

“Then I'll keep it to myself,” said Ernest, laughing; “for I know it's a good plan, and if it don't succeed, I'm a Dutchman!”

I wished him success, for I knew his heart was touched as much as the peculiar substance of which it was composed would allow, and I was certain he would make Miss Hollingston a very good husband; and, as everything is fair, it is said, in love as in war, why I did not express any opinion on the scheme he was turning over in

his busy little brain. His plans had never a dishonourable motive in view, and it isn't everybody that's quite a George Keldon. 'Heigho! my dear old George, when will you come back to me!' I could not help thinking of him even in the midst of society, you see, reader. Talking of love and marriage brought my first love and my husband into my head, and kept him there till I rose early in the evening to depart.

"You will come again soon, Barbara," said Alice, when we were in the dressing-room; "let me see often—not now and then, remember—the one true friend who wishes me better than I am,—one I can talk to, and from whom I can take a scolding."

"Can I do good by coming, Alice?"

"Oh! you mustn't talk about doing good—women blessed with a mission are unpleasant beings."

So, with these words ringing in my ears, I went away from the new Alice—left her with smiles on her face, light in her full blue eyes, everything that looked like happiness around her. It was pleasant to

know I had her love still, and that with the death of the old Alice there survived still the old affection ; but it was painful—very painful—to see how she had changed, and to know whose work it was !

CHAPTER III.

BAD NEWS.

I WAS glad that Andrew made no inquiry concerning my visit to Stamford Street; he was content to know Alice Tresdaile was well, and of that her brother's letter had already informed him. We took our places at the breakfast-table the following morning, and I talked of the opera and listened to his prophecies concerning his success, as I had talked and listened for some months past. Andrew had not worked very busily since the acceptance of the opera; he had not followed George Keldon's example, and turned to some task

which should relieve the wearisome hours of waiting, but had sat down with folded arms, pinning his fate to the one chance, and content to abide by the result. So waiting, and though wearied by delay, so sanguine still, through all the spring to the summer again. At that time, English Opera departed to the provinces, and Italian Opera reigned in its stead; Andrew's great musical composition was postponed till next November, and he said very patiently:—

“All the better for me, Barbara; Keldon will return before November, and be one *claqueur* the more when my opera is performed ‘for the first time on any stage.’ Keldon promised me he’d go up in the gallery and lead the gods on to enthusiasm.”

During the months of waiting I kept my promise to Alice, and went frequently to see her in Stamford Street; occasionally, at her especial request, taking the baby and its nursemaid with me. I never informed Andrew of my visits, but I have reason to believe he guessed their object, for he testified no curiosity concerning

them, and was alway more thoughtful on the evening of my return.

I did not experience a great deal of pleasure in these visits, for each one assured me how rapidly Alice Tresdaile was becoming the woman of fashion and the world, and it was no great consolation to know that she showed more of her heart to me than to any other living being. To reason with her now was a fruitless task that I soon relinquished; I could but wait and hope. Like Miss Hollingston, I tried to believe this new life was but a phase of her existence, to be changed one day for something worthy of her. Once I asked Ernest Tresdaile whether society were not exercising a prejudicial effect on Alice; whether all this party-giving, party-seeking were the fittest school wherein to train his sister's mind?

"Let her see the world," was the reply; "it will put her on her guard against adventurers—it will make a lady of her. In my opinion she has wonderfully improved, is losing fast all her sentimentality and

susceptibility, and becoming one after my own heart."

"Will this training continue long?"

"Till I marry Miss Hollingston, or start for India."

"Do you think of returning to India, sir?"

"Sometimes. I don't think London agrees with me, and India is almost my native climate. I think Alice would shine in India, too—catch some rich old nabob, with half-a-dozen lacs and only half a liver. She'll make a good match, some day; catch my sister Alice throwing herself away, *now!*"

The evening on which that conversation ensued is memorable for more than the worldly observations with which Ernest Tresdaile favoured me — an evening in June it was, with the drawing-room windows open, and the little breeze that found its way to Stamford Street faintly stirring the lace curtains. Miss Hollingston was absent, I remember, and Alice was playing the piano in an idle abstracted manner.

that reminded me of Andrew, probably occupied in the same listless fashion at home.

Ernest was still talking of India, stating, whether married or not, he thought he should try his fortunes in the East once more—had thought so some months, in fact, or he should have long since changed his unaristocratic quarters in Stamford Street, — when Mr. Barnaby Tresdaile's card was brought in by the page.

"Hollo!" said Ernest; "what does my easy-trotting cousin want, at nine in the evening, at Stamford Street—show the gentleman up, John."

Mr. Barnaby Tresdaile was shortly afterwards ushered into the drawing-room, smiling, bowing and rubbing one hand over the other. He seemed a little surprised to find me a guest there, but greeted me with his usual bland smile, expressed himself delighted to see me, and asked when I had heard last from his respected friend, Keldon. Smiles and greetings to Miss Tresdaile, "his charming cousin, Alice," as he called her,

and then he was seated at the window with Ernest. I had risen with the intention of joining Alice at the piano, when he laid his hand hastily on my arm.

"Pray, don't leave us, Mrs. Keldon; private and confidential as this interview is, I should be sorry to exclude you or Miss Alice, and your advice may be of service to me."

"I hope nothing serious has occurred," I said.

"Nothing very serious has occurred, Mrs. Keldon," said he, carelessly; "nothing that I cannot bear. What can't be cured must be endured, you know?"

"Well, what's the matter, Barnaby?" asked Ernest, hastily; "something about the Virginian Tobacco Association, for sixpence."

"You're right, sir."

"Smashed, eh?"

"It will be shortly."

"And you with it, Barnaby."

"Of course, my dear fellow, of course. I *am* the Virginian Tobacco Association, to a great extent!"

"And poor careful Bart., too," said Ernest, with an unsympathizing chuckle; "who has never lost a penny in his life, and has always taken care to be on the safe side of everything—poor, old, careful Bart.!"

I could not help feeling indignant at Ernest Tresdaile's exultation, till my attention was attracted to his cousin's countenance, on which a knotty kind of expression was visible that was extremely difficult to decipher.

"Poor, old, careful Bart. is on the safe side of the English Channel," said Barnaby at last, ruefully; "and though I am not generally inclined to wish anybody ill, upon my soul I should like to hear he was at the bottom of it, amazingly!"

"Bart. left England!" exclaimed Ernest.

"With every penny his greedy claws could grab hold of," said Barnaby; "all his own money, a great deal of mine, and three-fourths of the Association's;—made a sheer bolt of it, sir, left his wife and children to a paternal parish, and gone to the devil his own way!"

"This is sad news," said Ernest, becoming serious at once; "I didn't think so bad of Bart. as all that—I gave him credit for being an honest man, at least."

"He never had a chance of being anything else," grumbled Barnaby; "when his grandmother was alive she had the accounts made up every week, and looked very sharp after him, and it's only lately there has been an opportunity of mizzling on a grand scale. The Association was going down hill; *he* saw that as soon as anybody, and if he had stopped for the winding-up, he might have lost three or four thousand pounds. Bart. never liked losing anything!"

"What is to be done with the rascal?" asked Ernest.

"It is very doubtful if the law can touch him, save for deserting his wife. He has managed it so artfully, and got everything in such an extraordinary muddle, that it is doubtful what belongs to him, to me, or the Virginian. There's only one plain unvarnished fact in the books, and that is—there's a stiff amount of money missing, for

which nobody will be able to account, and that the loss will fall on the Directors, one of which honourable body I have the honour to be."

"And the rest of that fraternity?"

"Were introduced to the Board by Bart. as his particular friends; and as they *were* his particular friends, why, serve them right for keeping bad company!"

"And what does Barnaby Tresdaile expect to save from the wreck?" inquired Ernest.

"His name, he hopes," said Barnaby, with more pride than I had ever seen him exhibit; "nothing more! I have had a great deal to do with public companies in my life, seen all in which I have been concerned go to the dogs in no time, but I have been generally considered the unfortunate man, and never the scamp. When affairs are settled, I shall be no worse off than I was before my grandmother's decease—it's the fortune of war, that's all!"

One could but admire Barnaby Tresdaile's philosophy, as well as deplore his misfortunes. His was not a nature to feel very

acutely ; he had met with too many shocks early in life for this one to greatly unnerve him. He would have preferred remaining a rich man, but he was not going to sit idle and give way to despair because fate swept his fortune away from him.

"I thought I would not lose a chance," said Barnaby to Ernest ; "and although the Association will take some months to wind up, I had an idea that you might hear of a berth that would suit me in the meantime. You have lots of City acquaintances, and my assistance—*my advice*—might be of service to some of them."

"I don't know whether my friends in the City are in want of an adviser—I can't say at present," said Ernest ; "but I think I can find enough for you to do myself."

"Thank you, Ernest—I knew I had a friend in you."

"And if you will let me speak for an absent husband to whom you were a friend years ago, Mr. Tresdaile," I said to Barnaby, "let him assure you, through me, of his sympathy with your loss, and his offer of support."

"Thank you, thank you," said Barnaby, blowing his nose violently; "I was not prepared for so many kind offers of assistance."

Alice did not take part in this conversation; feigned, for I knew it was feigned afterwards, to be unmoved by the misfortune of one cousin, or the revelation which had left another infamous. She made no offers of assistance to Barnaby Tresdaile, expressed no regret at his loss, but sat on the music-stool humming softly to herself, and occasionally striking a chord, which, jarring suddenly upon the nerves of Barnaby, made him leap a little in his chair. I fancied Alice took no little pride in being thought above emotion now, and her studied efforts at indifference on that particular evening vexed me exceedingly.

After Barnaby had left us, and before Ernest had returned to the room, Alice said to me:—

"All the men whom I have met are money-worshippers! — the greatest blow that can befall them is to lose so many

thousand pounds, the greatest happiness to gain them."

"Don't you think Mr. Barnaby Tresdaile bears his troubles well?"

"In his way, perhaps. There is an affection of composure as well as of despair."

"You don't seem to pity him much?"

She gave one of her odious, little shrugs of the shoulders.

"I am so tired of hearing about money! It is my brother Ernest's constant peanism; it is the chorus with which the world joins in. What are Barnaby Tresdaile's sorrows to me?—did he—would he," she hastily corrected, "ever care for mine?"

"I think so."

"Each for himself is a grand motto—perhaps the wisest. In a real sorrow, if the arrow has gone deep, condolence adds to pain, not eases it. And," with a curling lip, "what sorrow, loss, so great as cousin Barnaby's!"

How bitterly she spoke; from what date had arisen her scorn of that for which the world was striving? Was it from the time

—not very far away—when she awoke to the knowledge of what schemers the desire for money can create.

Alice was silent and thoughtful after the return of her brother, and it was not till he had spent half-an-hour in speculating on the amount Bartholomew had started off with, that she broke silence in an indignant tone,

“Is there not a thought for the one who suffers most by this?”

“Who’s that?”

“The woman, of course! It is our sex that swells the ranks of martyrs.”

“And ours the ranks of knaves—how very complimentary!” replied Ernest; “but whom do you mean—Mrs. Bart. Tredaile, Alice?”

“Yes.”

“I have been thinking of her.”

“We must do something more than think for her who has lost all trust in the father of her children, and is left to face a world of granite.”

“We don’t know yet how much of trust

has been lost by Mrs. Tresdaile—whether, in fact, she don't intend to join her husband at the earliest opportunity."

"Ever suspicious."

"And we don't know, Mr. Ernest," I ventured to say, "whether she be not left with a broken heart."

"What! both women at once to the rescue!" cried Ernest. "I have done. I retire vanquished from the field. I acknowledge the injustice of my remarks, and will do penance by heading the subscription list."

"Come, a large sum, sir," said Alice.

"This isn't the time for large sums," said Ernest, suddenly becoming grave. "Large sums are wanted to stem back the tide, or keep the ship going; but I'll do my best, when the case is proved a fair one."

"Don't plead poverty," said Alice, "that is a style of cant the most detestable."

"Forcible young woman, there's no warding off your remarks," said Ernest; "they buzz round me like a swarm of hornets. I will not defend myself by another

word. I'm a rich man—all my ventures turn out well—I never lose a penny—I'm the shrewdest fellow who ever dabbled in the funds ! ”

“ Barbara, will you come with me to the poor woman ? ”

“ Certainly, I will.”

“ What ! to-night ? ” cried Ernest.

“ Yes,” was Alice's reply, couched in the firmest tones.

Ernest did not attempt to remonstrate. He knew his sister by this time. There was an end to argument ; he took up the *Times*, and plunged almost head-first into its contents. I set forth willingly with Alice upon this expedition—more than willingly, for it was a great joy to me to find a well-spring of deep feeling still existent in my old friend's heart.

CHAPTER IV.

BEFORE THE PUBLIC.

It is not my intention to dwell on the particulars of our interview with Mrs. Bartholomew Tresdaile — advancing surely, swiftly towards the end of these confessions, I cannot stop to tire the reader with new faces. No one at the last stage of his journey cares to be delayed by stranger hands.

It is sufficient to state here, that Alice and I found in Mrs. Bart. Tresdaile and her children deserving objects of support; found how little the runaway had cared for his home or the ties appertaining to

it when he ended a life of craft by turning robber. Alice was very kind and gentle with her cousin's wife, showed more womanly tact in disguising the bounty of her purse than I should have given her credit for, and would not let me participate in the good work.

"You have others to care for—there are no foreign claims to my money; there never may be, Barbara."

So she performed her woman's task, and went not away unrewarded for it. From the good deed that tries the heart and dims the eyes, do we ever reap an unprofitable harvest?—was it intended that we should by Him who prompts us in our duty?

Let me turn to the story of the opera; that opera which was to come out in November, and take the world by storm.

November came round in due course, again. I had prayed as anxiously for that damp, miserable, foggy season, as others had for summer, and the bright, flower-strewn days; and with the bleak month

at last there came the old lesson to the castle-builder, nothing but disappointment. Andrew's opera was still in abeyance, and the last letter of my husband put off his return till Christmas.

"I cannot think, my dear girl, that I am justified in complaining of this delay," he wrote; "for I am treated like a great man here, and the money rolls in much faster than I can spend it. I am in my element, too, and playing first fiddle to these high-cheek-boned chaps suits me to a T. I do not know how I shall reconcile myself to sailing under orders again. I give the Captain warning, if she is too hard upon me, I shall talk Russian and frighten her! Christmas will see me home, I hope, to try the experiment."

But Christmas did not see him home; Christmas came, and Andrew and I, with the two little ones, spent our Christmas-day together, and drank George Keldon's health. It was not a lively Christmas, though hope was with us, and no clouds that we could see were hovering in the distance.

George had written again ; he was still coming, coming ! The work was nearly completed, was perfectly successful, and had established his reputation. Two offers for the superintendence of a work of similar construction had been already made him—one, which he should accept, came from Merry England.

And before the New Year set in there arrived a manager's letter to my brother, appointing a day for the reading of the opera.

Suspense was at an end at last—the great experiment was to be tried, and, perhaps, another name to be made !

After the day of that reading, Andrew's stoical composure deserted him—the opera was put in rehearsal, and the most trying time to dramatic or operatic authors succeeded. All the petty rivalries and jealousies behind the scenes set in at once ; the anxiety of some to have more to say, the discontent of others at having too much work imposed upon them ; the stubborn resistance to the author's wishes ; the objec-

tion to one character, the flat refusal to take another; sopranos and contraltos at high words between the acts, and the first tenor thirsting for the baritone's vile life; no one recollecting his part, and everybody and everything in grand confusion.

There were times when Andrew, new to the stage, almost despaired of the opera being beaten into shape at all; and there was one dread crisis when the great tenor threw up his part and refused to play for Manager Jones, so long as Mr. Warbler trod the same boards with him. Even that stormy period was followed by a calm; Mr. Warbler received some salary in advance and took his discharge, and the pacified tenor returned to his post and sang more like an angel than ever. The momentary despair of Andrew was followed by the return of the old rash confidence; his whole soul was in his work, and the excitement of its progress shook him with no weak force. Many a sharp pang thrilled at my heart during the time which elapsed

between the rehearsal and the appearance of that opera; the pale face became so lined, and the look upon it so very old and haggard. He could talk of nothing but his opera, of the money it would bring him, and the atonement it would enable him to make.

I did not call on Alice so frequently, for I had my fears of leaving Andrew too much alone in the long evenings, and it was my task to divert his mind as much as possible from his work. Only once or twice during the winter I visited Stamford Street, and found the new Alice had replaced the old again. I had not seen the old impulsive Alice since she and I had called on the deserted wife, and I was left again in doubt whether the better nature were not slowly dying out! I heard much of party-giving, of public balls, of her life in the gay world of pleasure—that merry-go-round which a satirist has told us makes us first giddy and then sick! And yet, is the satirist true to nature? How many pleasure-seekers are there who follow the chase to the grave's

verge, and only resign their bright world when all that the world contains is sinking away from them!

Anxious about Alice as I might be, I was still more solicitous concerning Andrew; and my care for the latter kept me from the side of her to whom I might have been a help—some little check perhaps, to that hardening process of which Miss Hollingston had spoken. I had not forgotten Alice's own words—"Let me see often—not now and then, remember—the one true friend who wishes me better than I am." What though she had mocked at any woman's counsel after that; the words which had gone before had rung out from her heart, and were the wild cry of a despairing spirit.

The opera was underlined at last in the bills; one Monday in February was fixed for its production, and Andrew's excitement reached its height. To say that I was calm under the circumstances, would be to make myself out a very cold-blooded being—on the contrary, I was almost as disturbed as my brother, although I begged

him to be cool, and take me for a pattern of frigid deportment! I reasoned with him a little upon the worn subject of over-confidence, but no reasoning in the world would have been attended to by Andrew in those brain-disturbing moments;—he was intoxicated with hope.

The lessee of the theatre in which Andrew's opera was to appear was not a gentleman of refined notions; he put his trust in advertising and newspaper puffs, was fond of rousing the curiosity of the public and trading in its weakness. The week preceding the opera's appearance, strange paragraphs made their way into the daily and weekly papers concerning the coming opera and its author: in one paper he was a gentleman well known to the musical world; in a second he was shrouded in an impenetrable mystery, which might be dispersed when the authorship of "Junius's Letters" was discovered; whilst in a third he was boldly proclaimed to be the celebrated Mr. Quaver—till Mr. Quaver, in a letter of withering sarcasm, denied all title

to the honour. Andrew enjoyed this stir about his opera, although he knew every paragraph, and even Mr. Quaver's letter, was paid for by the manager.

"Is it always good policy to raise the expectations of the public?" I asked; "may not this loud flourish of trumpets be a little too premature."

"I must not quarrel with him who has extended the helping hand," said Andrew; "I am one in a thousand, to get my opera on the boards at all. I do not say I should have gone to work in the same manner—but after the first night what will it matter?"

He meant after the opera's success on the first night, what would the world care for the preliminary puffs; he was always thinking of success, and the dark side of the picture was turned for ever to the wall. Fate would not be hard upon him, after all his past efforts!

The Monday came at last. I remember little of it till the evening. The hours which passed before Andrew and I were in

the private box near the stage, are faint sketchy hours to me; spent in a thick fog, with the dim figure of Andrew — of half a dozen Andrews — wandering about the house. There had been a rehearsal in the morning, and Andrew had returned — I knew as much as that; but whether we had any dinner that day, or what became of the babies, or how we spent the afternoon, or if the day were wet or dry, remains to this moment a mystery.

It became reality, hard-working, everyday reality, when we sat in the private box at last; crouched together at the very back, and shrinking from the light as though the eyes of all the house were on the author and his sister. Andrew was very pale, and his excitement, though more outwardly subdued, was preying inwardly upon him.

"This is a great trial for you, Andrew," I whispered, laying my hand on his, so feverish and trembling; "you must not get nervous, dear."

"Oh, I am not very nervous!" he replied, brushing his hair from his forehead; "I am not afraid of the result."

"But do, *do* prepare a little for that which has happened to so many first works before—and be ready to face the worst."

"Yes, yes—of course," he answered, hurriedly; "is that the band in the orchestra, will you look, Barbara? I will not go to the front; some one may recognize me and point me out."

"Are you afraid to face those your opera has tempted hither?"

"Time enough when I make my bow before them!"

I did not tell him I was as nervous as himself, as I advanced to the front of the box, and for the first time looked round the theatre. The musicians were taking their places in the orchestra; there was a mass of people in the pit, there was another crowd in the high stifling gallery; ladies with their bright little cloaks over their white shoulders were entering the boxes and pit stalls, and their attendant cavaliers were placing them in the best positions, with the exception of one or two surly husbands, perhaps, who took the best themselves. It

was a busy scene, to which I was unaccustomed—George and I seldom troubling the theatres with our presence—and I surveyed it with great interest. All those pleasure-seekers, those well-worn stage-goers, those large, old, orange-sucking women in the pit, had come to see Andrew's opera; music, which hath charms to sooth the savage breast, had drawn together, under that gaily painted ceiling, all classes of society; lured them within the magic circle, and, I prayed, was to keep them spell-bound till the curtain fell on the last chorus. In their hands depended Andrew's future—the unshaven man in his shirt sleeves, sitting in the foremost row of the gallery, had a vote in it. Looking from my box, I wondered who amongst them were the critics—where sat the men who might make Andrew famous, or with a few strokes of the pen hold him up as an impostor?—a charlatan of music! Were “the sentinels in the grand army of letters” watchful at their post?

I was retreating back to Andrew when the door of a private box on the opposite

side opened, and a well-known figure stood within the aperture. Fascinated by her sudden appearance there, I remained a moment motionless; it was so strange that she should come that night! And yet she went everywhere now; sought the excitement of novelty in almost every shape—it was a dull, profitless evening if she spent it with the Lares. I watched her enter the box, followed by Miss Hollingston and Ernest Tresdaile; then I shrank back to my seat, and sat there silently.

From Andrew's post of observation, sitting with his face turned towards the stage, it was impossible to see her; by leaning forward in my chair, I could bring the box of the Tresdailes within range, and by shifting myself to the left till I touched the door of my own box, I could escape all recognition—a manœuvre which was immediately effected, without exciting the suspicions of my brother. Was it a good omen that Alice should sit there a witness to the success or failure of Andrew's first great work?—if she had only known that

it was *his* opera she had come to see ; the very opera he might have talked to her about when she was hopeful of him !

Thinking thus, when the first chords of the overture were struck and vibrated within me. I glanced at Andrew, he maintained the same attitude, but his eyes were of a feverish brightness.

"At last, then !" I said ; "good luck, Andrew !"

"Thank you," he answered, in a low, hoarse voice.

I said something about the house being very crowded, but he did not hear me, or was too excited to reply.

On went the overture—a clever, elaborate piece enough, played with spirit by the gentlemen of the orchestra. The audience was all attention, whilst the music, familiar enough to me—played over and over again as it had been on "Jem's piano," in my little front parlour — swelled through the large theatre. A round of applause testified to the approval of the public when the overture was concluded, and the pain-

ful pause to Andrew and me preceding the rise of the curtain followed.

Andrew's face flushed as the "sweet incense of praise" rose up from the theatre—I began to feel more sanguine myself. There might be a good many *claqueurs* packed amidst the mass, but I had heard the ring of genuine applause, and there was hope in it.

The curtain rose at last, and the village beauties advanced in a crowd to the front and burst into voice—the opera had begun! What the plot of that opera was about there is no occasion to trouble the reader—there were the usual ingredients of an ill-used tenor, a disappointed baritone, and a ruffianly bass; there was a soprano much trampled upon by her relatives, and, of course, deeply in love with a very ineligible person to marry—there were lover's quarrels, misconceptions, and so on. It was an old, well-known drama *operatized*, and the plot went on smoothly enough through the first act, and no shadow of discontent rested on the brow of the audience. The

tenor had gained an encore, and the soprano had narrowly missed one—in fact, the slight skirmish between the “ayes” and “noes” concerning the last question, had been the only breeze that had ruffled the surface. When the act drop descended there was some renewed demonstrations of approval; albeit no very great amount of enthusiasm. The success of the opera was not yet determined.

Andrew remained silent beside me; the nervous fingers still interlaced, and the eyes in the one direction where his fortune lay. I took a second look round the house, and at the box opposite. They were talking about the opera in the pit; two old gentlemen in very seedy vestments were evidently discussing its merits, and three young men standing beneath the boxes were laughing heartily at something—I feared it was Andrew's sentiment! In the box on the other side of the theatre, Alice Tresdaile was listening to some remarks of a new comer, who had taken his place by her side since I had

looked in her direction, and in whom I recognized the young man from the City with the ethereal moustache. It seemed quite a flirtation again, and yet I fancied, as Alice once or twice turned from him and looked round the house, that there was a weary expression on her countenance.

A long time between the acts—so long a time that the pit and gallery became impatient, and began to stamp with their feet, and rattle, rattle, in a very irritating manner with their sticks and umbrellas. The musicians fiddled on, and the gods, excited by opposition, responded with cat-calls that split my ears, and curdled my blood unpleasantly.

The act-drop rose at last, and the refractory part of the audience settled down again. There was a ballad for the tenor very early in the second act, and a few persons in the pit, probably hired for the occasion, required its repetition. But the majority of the audience seemed to object to encore everything, and the minority standing their ground better than on the first

occasion, a storm set in which rendered the dialogue on the stage incomprehensible. Three minutes at least before the minority gave way, and the opera was allowed to continue. I looked into the pit again; I knew by instinct, as actors know by experience, that the fate of a new piece chiefly depends upon the pit, and I fancied there were a great many grim faces turned towards the stage. The next two or three songs went off flatly; the baritone's was even received in solemn silence; one man in the orchestra stalls leaned forward and whispered to a friend, who shrugged his shoulders and whispered something back again—were they critics?—oh! my poor Andrew, were they critics? I did not dare to look at the object of my solicitude now; I had not the heart to seek to encourage him with false hopes which the next air and its reception might break down for ever. Still, the tide might turn; many of my favourite pieces had not been sung yet—if the people would not all look so serious! A soprano air, an attempt at encore, another for-

midable resistance but with a different result, for the stage heroine,—rather too prematurely in my opinion—repeated the ballad, and was rewarded for her haste by sundry hisses, which lasted half through the first verse.

“I must have enemies in the house,” said a hoarse voice behind me.

Andrew had ventured to the front, was leaning forward, and looking timidly down into the pit. How his hand shook as it rested on the velvet cushion of the box!

“It was foolish to repeat the song,” I said.

“Madness—madness!”

“We must not care for everybody’s opinion,” I said to Andrew; “not one quarter of the people here are musicians, or fit to be your judges.”

“I am in their hands—it is life or death to me.”

He went back to his place with a sigh, and I was thankful that his restless eyes had not recognized the old loves in the opposite box. I felt that he would have

enough to bear to-night without the knowledge that Alice and Miss Hollingston were there; felt that only something very new and striking could save the opera now—and that the opera did not contain! I went to Andrew's side again; at every expression of disapproval, at which he shrunk as though a blow were aimed at him, I laid my hand upon his arm to give him courage, for I was full of fear that his excitement would unman him.

Shall I ever forget his look at me, his nervous clutch of my hand, when the second act was finished, and applause and dissent were each stormily expressed? It was almost a tumult—those interested in its success calling for the principal singers, and those indignant at the attempt to thrust them before the curtain without a legitimate reason, hissing, shouting, stamping.

“Courage, brother!”

He gave a sickly smile, but did not answer.

“Shall we go home, Andrew?”

“Home!” he cried surprised; “what,

before the next act? We don't know what success that may meet with, Barbara—it is the best, if you remember!”

“But our presence here will not add to its success.”

“I'll sit it out,” he answered, patiently; “I'm not a child—I can bear this cowardly attack—I'm quite calm,” he added, with his ashen lips quivering.

Poor Andrew had set it all down to his enemies. What a host of enemies, authors, artists, actors and vocalists suffer from! Never the bad book and the crude plot that sends the novel, still-born, to its grave; never the bad picture, the faulty acting, the weak notes—always the foes behind the scenes who owe them such spite, and track them so surely to the death!

There had been so much said about the opera in the newspapers, that the production of a work a little below the average—yes, a little below it, despite the genius which flashed forth at times and spoke of better things—had naturally disappointed many in that crowded theatre. I did not

seek to prove this to Andrew myself, but I was certain in my own mind that the opera had been fairly tried and found wanting.

The third act commenced under unfavourable circumstances—the tenor forgot his part and blundered miserably through one of the best airs in the piece, and the discontented audience groaned at him for his forgetfulness. It was easy to see at a glance that the actors and singers had grown dispirited in the cause, and walked through their parts like automatons. Lack of animation in the actors, added to a piece dull enough in itself, generated the customary result; the signs of disapprobation became more manifest—the hisses, shouts, catcalls, beating of sticks and umbrellas on the floor, broke forth in the middle of the act, and brought the curtain prematurely down. It was all over now—hope was not only checked, but utterly extinguished! Andrew staggered as he rose.

“Will you lean upon my arm?”

“No, no. Let us go home, for God’s sake!”

One glance towards the box on the opposite side again ; everybody very merry there, Alice and the gentleman from the City laughing heartily together—did it matter to them whose hopes were dashed down by the failure of that night? From the glare of the theatre to the dimly-lighted streets went Andrew and I together. He was so weak when he stood in the box lobby, that I drew his arm through mine without asking his consent, and he tottered on beside me like an old man. It was no common disappointment; not alone the failure of his opera, but the loss of hope in better days, and a more honourable life. The hand of Fate had struck at him heavily, and he was unprepared !

“No chance now, Barbara,” he murmured, when we were in our cab.

“Oh ! don’t say that.”

“No chance of anything for me—there’s nothing worth the living for !”

“We will talk of this to-morrow, dear.”

When the morrow came, it found him back again upon his sick bed, more weak,

helpless, hopeless than in the past dark days when we brought him from a debtor's prison. All his hopes and mine seemed to have died out, indeed, when I stood once more as nurse at his bedside; when the blinds were drawn again before the windows, and he lay wrestling with his fever.

CHAPTER V.

RELAPSE.

Is not that a true saying, that "the relapse is worse than the disease"? To fall back into the arms of the fever that burned at our brain and robbed us of health, strength and memory, is to become again a prey to the enemy, without half the nerve to resist the attack. Equally fatal is the moral relapse—falling from the new hope to the old, crushing despair when the world was so dark, and there was never a star! Farewell, then, to the good resolutions made in the hour of repentance, when our sin looked so black; and down,

down to the lower depths, whence only angels can save us!

Sitting by my brother's bedside, unknown to the eyes that stared at me so awfully; mistaken for Alice, Miss Hollingston, his mother, and a hundred others whose names were new to me, I thought at times it might be better if he died thus.

When the skill of medicine had reduced that fever, and he could feebly reach his hand towards me and murmur, "Barbara," the thought would come as often, there was so strange a look upon his face. The first words uttered coherently told of his despair—awful, heart-sinking words they were, muttered rather than spoken, between closed teeth:—

"God turns away from me!"

"Andrew — Andrew!" I whispered, reproachfully.

It was no time to reason with him, to speak of the wickedness that charged his Maker with deserting him; I left it for an hour more fitting. Not for the hour when

his strength came back, for that seemed wholly to have deserted him—but when he was calm and quiet, and his pulse was beating gently. He lay in bed and listened to me, but my words changed not the expression of the dark, defiant-looking face.

“You are a good woman, sister—you have more faith than I.”

“Are you not thankful for the mercy that restores you to reason, takes from you the fever?”

“No.”

“Why not?”

“The *mercy*,” he said, mockingly, “has brought me back the memory of disgrace—shown me the utter hopelessness of the life that lies beyond.”

“There is no life that’s hopeless.”

“A trite and false remark—I don’t believe in it.”

“But, Andrew, you make me so unhappy,” I implored; “for this despair is so unnatural. You are young; the same energy which enabled you to compose an unsuccessful work will help you to create—”

He held up his hand quickly—too quickly, for the action brought the flush to his cheek, the palpitation to his heart.

“Don’t speak any more of my energy,” he cried; “of what great things I am to do in the future—it is maddening!”

Knowing how much he suffered, I turned to subjects less likely to disturb him, and he lay and feigned to listen, till he slept. It was my severest trial to see how he combated every effort of mine to turn his thoughts to lighter channels; to note that day after day passed, and only his morbid scepticism grew stronger.

One day, when my concern for his health had brought one of England’s greatest physicians to his bedside, Andrew, after responding to every question put to him, startled Dr. A—— with a question of his own.

“How long is this likely to last?”

“To last?” responded the physician.

“A week—a month—will you give me a month?”

“Till you are better?”

"Till I am dead, sir?"

"Oh! we musn't talk of dying yet a while, my good man."

Andrew did not press him for a definite answer, but in my little parlour I repeated that terrible inquiry which most of us have asked for our friends with faltering lips and beating heart.

"It is impossible to say—he is a young man," was the evasive reply.

"But what do *you* think, sir?"

"Is he your husband?" was the next question.

"No—my brother."

"I would be prepared for the worst," were his last words, as he walked towards his carriage.

I went back into the parlour, to my seat by the fire-side and my bitter struggle with my grief. *Prepared for the worst!*—to see him taken from me in his youth, and to know that he would leave me with no consolation in the present, and no hope in the hereafter!

"Oh! let him live a few more months,

and give me time to pray for him, *with him*, and see the awakening of his better nature ere he die!" *Prepared for the worst!*—but yet the worst might be spared me; the physician had said that he was young, and life, and hope and strength, are youth's prerogatives.

Was I prepared for the worst when I was hoping against hope; when the Jersey farm was deserted, and my dear father and mother were in London, living near me, and coming day after day, with their grave faces and their anxious, "How is he now?" Were the Jersey farmer and his wife prepared?—and ah! was Andrew?

Andrew grew weaker every day, after the arrival of his parents in London—weaker, yet more self-willed. I did my duty by him at that crisis; I sought, with all my power—it was not much—to turn him from the train of thought which weighed upon his mind, and exercised with force its evil influence; but no efforts of mine could rouse him from his apathy. There he lay in his bed, day after day, caring not

to speak, refusing to be read to, answering in monosyllables every question put to him, and staring for hours at a little model of my husband's making, which stood on the mantel-piece facing the bed's foot.

There came a change at last, when he was very weak, and I was full front with despair, yet clinging still to hope.

"Barbara," he whispered, one day when I was preparing his room for the doctor's visit; "is it not customary in these cases to ask if there be anybody the patient would wish to see?"

It was a question strangely put, and I shivered as I replied.

"Is there any one you wish to see then, Andrew?"

"Yes."

After a moment's pause, he added:—

"And more than one. There is Keldon, I should like to have seen, Barbara; to have bidden good-bye to, and given my thanks for his old, generous, misplaced kindness. You will have to thank him for me?"

"Oh! no, no!"

"My blessing is not good for much," he murmured; "but God bless him!—he did his best to save me!"

"If you would but think you are not lost, Andrew," I implored; "would but see some good man—some minister, or—"

"I see a good woman every day at my bedside—if her gentle, all-forgiving words have no power to console me, of what avail would be a stranger's? Barbara, can you hear me?"

"Yes."

"My voice is very weak to-day—is soon spent. Come a little nearer to me?"

I approached him, and his thin hand stole from the bed-clothes and sought my hand, which it grasped eagerly in his.

"I wish to see *her*."

"Alice!"

"Yes, yes—Alice—she who might have been my wife had I been an honest man. I wish to ask her forgiveness for the evil I have caused her. Will she grant it—will she see me?"

"I hope so."

"You don't speak confidently."

"I doubt if seeing her would not disturb you too much—if any good can arise from such an interview. Let me go to her, if you will, and ask her forgiveness for you—it will be granted, I am sure."

"Go to Alice Tresdaile, and say it is the wish of one undeserving of a single favour, to see her for a moment—a moment more in life! If she refuse it, or think the trial will be more than she can bear, ask her to forgive the past and the guilty part I played in it."

"No other request, Andrew?"

"I should like to hear that Miss Hol-
lingston—if she can be found—pardons, too,
all that I have done to embitter her life—
it will make my last hours more easy."

"You believe in earthly power to console you, and refuse the heavenly; seek for pardon from erring mortals like yourself, and never turn one prayer to God, who alone has power to comfort and console you!"

He did not answer—once I fancied his lip trembled, as though my exhortation had for the moment moved him; then the stony look came back, and he said, quickly,

“If Miss Tresdaile will not pain herself by seeing me, bid her good-bye for me, and say that I am sorry for the past.”

“I will.”

“Perhaps her brother will see me, if she refuses,” added Andrew, as he released my hand; “will you ask him?”

“Yes.”

“Thank you—who’s that at the door?”

“Mother.”

“Ah! poor mother!” he murmured, “come in and talk to me of those better days when I was the mother’s boy!”

Low-spirited, and finding great difficulty in keeping the tears from my eyes, I set forth on my expedition to Stamford Street, far from sanguine as to the result of my mission. Assured as I was of the real goodness of Alice’s heart, I was also uncertain how Andrew’s request might be received. To find her in her scornful moods,

or in her capricious, worldly ones—in a word, to find her the new Alice—might be to hear much which I could not respond to calmly, or with that careful tact which brought forth her better nature. I had but to state my brother's wish, to hear her answer, and retire; every minute away from him seemed at that time an hour of suspense.

Alice was at home, and playing the piano in the drawing-room. The notes of the gay dance-music jarred upon my nerves as I followed the servant up the stairs.

"What! Barbara Keldon at last!" cried Alice, leaving the music stool, and coming towards me with extended hands; "I thought you had forgotten me, or that in the last interview I had said something to affect your sensitiveness and make you angry with me. But I will not scold you—fortunately for yourself, you find me in the best of tempers."

"Indeed," I replied, mechanically.

Alice was regarding me attentively; taking note, I was aware, of my pale face, and the careworn look that had altered

it so much, although she said lightly:—

“I have had a very happy week—a quiet one, alone in this great house. Such an agreeable change for me after the round of gaiety which always makes my head dizzy and my brain hot. I feel sorry it is to end to-morrow, but Ernest and his wife are afraid of my getting dull!”

“Ernest and his wife!” I repeated.

Alice laughed pleasantly at my surprise.

“Miss Hollingston and brother Ernest were married a week since—they have gone to Paris, and will return to-morrow.”

“A short honeymoon.”

“Yes,” replied Alice; “but it is not alone solicitude for me that brings them home so early—Mr. and Mrs. Ernest Tresdaile are persons who study economy.”

I was at a loss to understand this, although too anxious to fulfil my task to be curious concerning it. Alice, however, hastened to explain.

“Ernest would not let me write to you and tell you the news—would not even allow me to forward you the wedding-cards till his

return. But it is no secret, and I am not a good one at obedience. The fortunes of my brother, Barbara, have fallen to the ground with a nice little crash—gone after poor Barnaby Tresdaile's."

"I am very sorry."

"No one else is, my grave Mrs. Keldon," replied Alice; "never was the loss of a fortune taken with greater composure. We Tresdailes were intended for a new race of stoics. A fortnight since Ernest confessed over the breakfast-table that he was not worth a clear two thousand pounds, and that all his fine schemes had ended in ruin. He did not require much comforting; he has the energy of his cousin, George Keldon, and the confidence to believe he will work his way up again. He told us he only wanted a wife to sustain him in his new labours; and he found his misfortunes had greater power to charm Miss Hollingston than all the Bank Stock of which he was once possessed. But come to my room and take your things off—I have so many things to tell you."

"I cannot stay, Alice, to-day, thank you."

"Oh! I shall not let you escape me," cried Alice, "for it is not often that I see my runaway cousin-in-law, now."

I shook my head, and Alice's large eyes again steadily surveyed me. She said at last:—

"There is something wrong at home!"

"Yes."

"I hope you are not going to say you have heard bad news of Mr. Keldon?"

"He is well, and will be home next month, please God."

"Your children?"

"Well also."

"I can guess the news now," said Alice, quite calm, yet grave; "and you must pardon me, but you should have been prepared for it. Dear Barbara, best of friends," holding my hands in hers again, "you have allowed your sanguine heart to mislead you too much in this case—you have built your castle on a quicksand!"

"No, no—even now, I hope not—I pray to God not!"

"Barbara, *he* has repaid your love and kindness by ingratitude—I read that on your face—I'm sure of it!" she cried; "his weak struggle to resist temptation is over, and all the old sins have swept back on his soul. Don't cry, dear, remember one who had more hope in him than you, and suffered more when it was lost for ever!"

She uttered those words passionately, and dashed some drops from her eyes with an angry hand, as though their presence there displeased her. Was it the old Alice or the new standing there before me?

"It is not often I have seen you weeping bitterly, Barbara, but it is often you have consoled *me* when I was the young girl, weak, wilful and impetuous," she said; "will you let me now, in my turn, try what I can do to make your faithful heart less heavy?"

The arms stole round my neck and drew my head to her heaving chest; her rounded cheek lay for a moment against mine. She was all love and gentleness then, and there was no worldliness in the embrace which held me to her. It was my dear Alice once

again—my Alice, who remembered the day of her own distress, and did not seek to hide it.

“Alice, dear,” I said, “the Andrew whom you knew will never come again, and not all the resolutions he has formed will sink away from him even in despair. He has changed, but still his repentance for the past is earnest and sincere.”

I felt the arms relax in their embrace ; the cheek recline less fondly against mine.

“It is at his request that I am here to-day.”

We had been sitting together on the couch, but she sprang from me at those words, and stood at some little distance, fiery and disdainful.

“At *his* request !” she cried ; “how dare he, or such as he, think of me for an instant ! What request, no matter of what nature, can he send by you, which is not an insult to my woman’s pride !”

“It is the strangest of requests, Alice.”

“Well, well ?” she cried, impatiently.

“He wishes to see you—he is—”

"Were he on his dying bed he has no right to see me," Alice cried, trembling with passion—"and I should despise the past deceit too much to grant his wish. Tell him that from me!"

I did not answer; I sat silent for some moments. When I looked at Alice again, half-sadly, half-reproachfully, she had turned as white as death.

"Barbara," she cried, in an altered tone, "what is it?"

"Oh! Alice, Alice!" I sobbed forth, "he is dying!"

She drew a long breath, but retained her old position, and kept her gaze directed to me. All her passion had vanished away like a breath; her face had become suddenly old and lined, her lips were grey.

"Dying—given up by the physicians?" she asked, at last.

"Yes."

"What hope has he, Barbara?"

"He does not care to live," I said; "he lies like a weak child on his bed, and has no faith—no fear!"

"God help him!" was the low response.

I had recovered my emotion, when she said, firmly,

"Barbara Keldon, it is better for him, for me, that we should part thus; I can offer him no comfort, or say one word to cheer him. It would avail nothing to talk of a past that has worked evil to us both."

"Perhaps so," I answered; "I am not anxious you should meet."

"What was his message to me?"

I told her, and she drew a second long breath, and once more paused awhile before she spoke.

"Tell him I forgive him," were the words uttered, or wrenched out slowly from her closed lips.

"No other message?"

"No other!" she repeated.

I rose to leave her; I went to her side and kissed her in silence, then turned to go away. I knew that she was suffering deeply, struggling very hard against a hundred emotions warring within her to unnerve her. In that trying moment, struck

with the shock of my revelation, I had no right to judge her—to think her coldness, her inflexibility, unkind to me in my grief. She had much to bear; if she bore it in her own strange manner, she did not feel less deeply. She was acting for the best, too, in her judgment and in mine—sparing herself, me, Andrew, much of unnecessary pain.

“I could speak a great deal, Alice, of his past efforts to be good,” I said; “of the cause of his last illness—of his struggles to atone to you, to your brother’s wife, for the wrong done in the past. But the time is not fitting, and I have been too long away!”

“Some other time,” responded Alice.

“Your brother Ernest will call and see him—he expects him.”

“He shall come to-morrow.”

“Good-bye.”

“Good-bye!”

I went out of the room, leaving her standing in the same position, looking towards the couch I had quitted as though I sat there still, and was still telling her the story that had turned her into stone.

CHAPTER VI.

HER BROTHER.

WHEN I was at Andrew's side again, I found some difficulty in encountering the eager, wistful looks bent on me. It was hard to thwart his wishes now!

"Have you seen her, Barbara?"

"Yes."

"Will she come?"

"She thinks it for the best that she should stay away—that it would pain both you and her too much to meet."

He turned on his side with a heavy sigh.

"She is in the right; I was a selfish man

to expect to bring her here—I have been selfish all my life!”

“That which remains to be forgiven—she forgives.”

“She is all that is good,” he answered.

The rest of that day he was very silent; during the night, for it was my turn to sit up with him, he was somewhat feverish again, and in his restless snatches of sleep inclined to wander. It is always a trying time to the friendly watcher to listen to the wanderings of the fever-stricken, to hear the deep voice of the loved one talking with the friends far away, absent, or dead; to know that he is wandering back into the past, or into the shadowy dream-land with strange figures that have never lived. It was a trying time to me; he spoke so much of the old days at St. Brelade, when we were boy and girl together; of his father, of his first piano, of all the wishes for a future which had closed in and left him thus!

Weaker than ever the next day; slowly and surely sinking, only the hand of God

to save him from his early grave! Will it be stretched out in Infinite mercy, and my poor brother yet be spared me?—or, in All-wise wisdom, will he be taken from me!

Late in the evening, Ernest Tresdaile arrived. He came softly into the bed-chamber, and touched me on the shoulder with his hand.

"It is kind of you to come," I said, rising and shaking hands with him.

"In such times as these, it is a duty, not a kindness," answered Ernest, in a whisper; "how is he?"

"Very weak."

"Asleep?"

"No, not asleep, Mr. Tresdaile," answered Andrew, drawing back the curtains of the bed.

The two young men looked earnestly at each other. What a contrast they presented!—the white face of the one, the bronzed features of the other; life dying out, and life and energy in full vigour.

"Well, Bloyce," said Ernest, with that

assumed cheerfulness of tone which people will adopt in sick rooms, "I did not expect to meet you like this, old fellow."

"The world is full of surprises," answered Andrew faintly.

Ernest held out his hand, and Andrew placed his own within it.

"I have been anxious to see you, sir—I was afraid you would forget me."

"I have the best of memories."

After Ernest had shaken my brother's hand, Andrew said :—

"Your sister has told you of my wish to see her."

"Yes."

"I had no right to ask so great a favour—it was presumption, selfishness."

"She could do no good, you see," replied Ernest.

"What I was anxious to tell *her* I can relate to you sir," said Andrew; "I am glad now she has spared herself the trial."

"All's for the best," said Ernest, cheerfully.

"I tell you, in the hope that one day you will convince her I was not wholly bad, and that I have made some efforts to retrieve my name, and live in good men's memories, — I am so anxious that she should think a little better of me."

"Why distress yourself, Bloyce, at such a time as this? I believe I have judged you harshly—I will take your word that you have repented of the past, and made every effort to amend."

"Thank you—but I would rather you should hear me."

"I was only anxious to avoid explanation, for your own sake," said Ernest, drawing a chair to the bed-side, and seating himself; "now, then, I am at your service."

"Let me go back for a little while to the past wherein I was a gamester and a schemer—Barbara, don't leave me—I may get faint, dear."

"Then, my dear fellow," cried Ernest, "what is the good—"

"Let me have my own way in this,"

Andrew pleaded earnestly, "it is the last favour, Mr. Tresdaile."

"Go on, go on," said Ernest.

Leaning my arm on the mantel-piece, and looking into the hollow red fire, I stood and listened to my brother's voice—at times so weak and low; at other times, when his story agitated him, so deep and thrilling. How vividly is daguerreotyped on our memory scenes akin to this—how strangely we remember, in the midst of our great troubles, incidents the most trifling and minute! That scene on that night stands out clear and sharp; it is a picture in which nothing has been lost to me. Not alone the wasted figure in the bed and the listener by the side, but the pattern of the paper on the wall, the particular folds into which the bed curtains had fallen, a chair out of its place near the door, the medicine bottles on the mantel-piece, a little reference-bible on the dressing-table. I seem to hear again the whispers and hard breathing of the sick man, the quick responses of the visitor, the wind sighing outside in the

street, the grating together of the coals as they burned hollow and collapsed.

"When I was confronted with Miss Hollingston on that winter's night from which dates Alice's release," commenced Andrew, "I made no attempt to justify my actions; I acknowledged my wrong, and said only, that midst all my plotting, I had loved your sister. At that time I might have framed too readily my excuses and deceived her, or might have adopted a course more honest—a little more honest—and told the truth, with the few extenuating circumstances left me. That truth would not have kept me Alice, but might, I think now, have made my memory less hateful to her."

"Water!" said Ernest, quickly.

"No, no, I am not faint," said Andrew,—"don't move, Barbara, I can manage very well."

Ernest urged a gentle remonstrance, to which my brother paid no heed. He was determined to tell all.

"I might have confessed," he continued,

“that when my actions appeared to me so full of craft, that I dared hardly follow them, there was a devil always at my side to tempt me with his specious words—how Alice loved me, how poor I was, how her money would avert my ruin! I could have said that that devil’s agent was Bartholomew Tresdaile; that I met him very often, and that every time saw a fresh mesh in the web he spun around me. My love for Alice at times, I might have added, was so powerful, prompted me to act so justly, that it was only by fresh threats, fresh difficulties, the man reduced me to the pitiable knave and coward that I was. To have acknowledged to Alice that our engagement must be ended, and that its fulfilment would make neither happy, was to shut me in a prison and cover me, and all who had trusted me, with shame. I was content to go on, hoping like a madman that some lucky venture might set me right, till I became the slave of a bad man, and the greater slave of my weak will. You know how all this ended?”

Ernest nodded.

"That I loved her is but a poor excuse. I would have made her a gamester's wife, taken a release from my debts and a few hundred pounds from Bart. Tresdaile, seen that man enriched with her fortune, gone surely with Alice down the road to ruin. God be thanked for the hour that saved her from me!"

"Do not dwell any more on this theme, Bloyce," urged Ernest; "it is painful to you, it don't spare me, and I'm a hardened fellow too. I am glad to hear, *she* will be very glad to hear, what a struggle your good and evil angels had for the mastery during that engagement. Let us think the good angel would have won the fight at last, and left you to confess all frankly, had not Miss Hollingston stepped forward."

Andrew shook his head and said:—

"I was too great a coward. Keep your seat, sir," he added, quickly, as Ernest made a movement to rise; "I have a little more to tell you, *for her*."

Ernest glanced from Andrew to me, and

raised his eyebrows in an inquiring manner. I nodded my head, and he remained.

"My good angel came late in the day," Andrew began again; "or rather," he corrected, "I was late to acknowledge her. She has been by my side ever since; she is standing there now, faithful and loving to the last."

"Oh, Andrew!"

"You have been the ministering angel in my trouble," he said, "and have not deserted the unworthy. My blessing is worth little, but a higher one, I am sure, rests on you—rewards you with a happy home, a good husband, loving children."

His earnestness was very touching; I had to turn my head to the fire again and cry silently to myself. Meanwhile Andrew continued.

"My good angel, Mr. Tresdaile, rescued me from a debtor's prison, offered me the shelter of her home, made a friend for me in her husband, nursed me through an illness akin to this, brought me back to new life, new thoughts, new resolutions,

showed me the error of my ways for the first time in my life, and taught me energy and honesty. Comforted and encouraged by her, I began to hope there might come a day when I could reward her for her love; when I could even make a name for myself, and prove to your sister I had repented of the past and become an honourable man. It was a dream of vanity, and it ended—like a dream!”

“But what ended it?—did your perseverance fail you?”

“Not till I knew perseverance was of no longer use; till I was convinced that I had been following a shadow, and that God had deserted me; till I met with fresh disgrace, and the world howled at me for my presumption. I can hear its yells and hisses now!”

He shuddered as he spoke.

“I don't see why one failure should have disheartened you,” said Ernest.

“Not sitting there, strong of will and full of health, perhaps not,” returned Andrew, bitterly; “but change places with me—have

the dark past to ever reproach you, and the hours of a darker future in which to work limited. Take my sullied name, and be sure in your own heart that there will be little time to clear it; set your mind to one task, feeling sure there is only that one before you; bind your soul up with it, and then feel it hewn from you remorselessly, leaving no proof left behind, save your own word—not to be trusted—that you tried to be a better man."

"The work remains a proof," said Ernest.

"Proof of my labour, not of my intentions. Who will believe the last that has known Andrew Bloyce?"

"I will."

"*You will?*" exclaimed my brother, "you, a man of the world, and a sceptic—you who have mistrusted me all my life. Thank you, thank you, I have one friend the more!"

"Andrew," I said, "you must leave the rest to me! You have spoken too much already, and your strength must not be further taxed. I forbid it."

"You have been a very tolerant nurse—

and perhaps—I am too weak—just now!”

He closed his eyes, and Ernest started up. He had fainted, or rather fallen off into a deep, heavy stupor which would sometimes last for hours, and for which I had been prepared. There was no remedy in my power, or in the power of medicine, to raise him from those stupors—they baffled the physician; nature alone, in her own time, brought him back to consciousness. It was my fear—I believe the fear also of his medical attendants—that in one of those deep sleeps he would pass from the life around him to the world of mystery lying beyond.

As I leaned over him and bathed his temples, I related, in a few words, the little that remained to tell—the story of his visionary schemes. Of his opera and the hopes based on it; of the money it might have brought him, and for whom, by way of atonement, it was intended.

“This was true repentance,” said Ernest, in a whisper; “poor fellow, I have judged him harshly.”

"We have no right to judge the erring—it is forbidden."

"My dear Mrs. Keldon, we are not all Christians."

He stayed with me but a short time longer; he would have waited till Andrew gave signs of recovery, but I said that the sight of him might bring on fresh excitement, and my conscience was not quite satisfied with what I had already assented to that evening. Still it had been Andrew's wish, and his wishes were so few!

After he had bidden me good-night, and informed me he should look in again tomorrow, he turned back and said, in his more natural and brisk manner:—

"Mrs. Keldon, you have not congratulated me on that event which Alice forestalled me by relating."

"I beg your pardon for forgetting it to-night, but my mind has been very much disturbed."

"My dear madam, I can imagine that."

"I congratulate you heartily. I think you have secured one who will adorn

your home, cheer your life, raise your standard of thought, and make you the best of wives."

"Thank you, thank you—I am sure she will."

He walked again thoughtfully towards the door, then turned back a second time.

"What the deuce do you mean by raising my standard of thought?" he asked; "am I a very low-minded wretch?—I wasn't aware of it."

"No—one of the best meaning little fellows in the world, but not exactly—"

"Not exactly a straightforward one, eh?" he added, sharply; "more inclined to walk round a brick wall than to butt my head against it? I remember your worthy husband nearly upsetting my dignity by recommending the latter expedient one night, as more honest and forcible. Thank you, Mrs. Keldon, and good-night."

"Good-night!"

"Oh! by the way," returning for the third time, "you have not sympathized with my loss of fortune, either—the grand

dissolving view of Grandmother's Money."

"No, but I will, if you like."

"No, don't. I didn't lose it straightforwardly—in fact," in a whisper across the bed, "*I haven't lost it at all*, but Miss Hollingston was only to be won by a poverty dodge—ha! ha!"

And with a knowing little chuckle, Ernest took himself off, so wrapped up in conceit at his own manœuvres, that he had almost forgotten him whose sufferings had moved a place in a heart seldom touched.

I had soon a host of thoughts foreign to Ernest Tresdaile and his peculiar style of scheming; there was so much to dwell upon and wait for in the room he had quitted.

CHAPTER VII.

HERSELF !

ANDREW BLOYCE recovered from his stupor during the early hours of the following day. He made no allusion to his interview with Ernest Tresdaile yesternight, but it seemed to me, watching keenly for the slightest change, that there was visible an air of less depression, even of more resignation. Weak as he was, it was difficult to detect a further waning of his strength, and it might have been my own nervous susceptibilities that saw a greater effort in his attempt to move, or stretch his hand towards me.

Clinging to hope still, as mother, father,

sister will cling, we kept up the staff of doctors and physicians, hung upon their words, and followed their advice. The great man who a few days since had prepared me for the worst, came the day following Ernest Tresdaile's visit, and remained some time with Andrew. When he rejoined me in the parlour, he said:—

“I dont see much difference, Mrs. Keldon. He may linger on for weeks.”

“And then?”

“And then, unless a re-action takes place, you will lose him.”

“But—but, sir, is there a chance of such re-action?” I implored; “oh! tell me there is just a chance?”

“So faint a chance, that I would not have you build upon it,” was the answer; “or the disappointment will fall all the heavier. Were he even to recover, he would always be a weak, delicate man. May I ask,” he added, after a pause, “if he be desirous of living?”

“I fear not.”

“He appears to me to be devoid of any

wish, or hope—to be utterly regardless of the future,” said the physician; “I need not say that that is very much against him. Give him something to hope for, to look forward to, if you can; I don’t say it will save him now, but it offers the faint chance I have spoken of.”

“He will listen to no hope, sir,” said I, sadly.

“Ah! that is bad.”

The physician took his fee and his departure, and left me to my sister’s duties. They were onerous and responsible, might have preyed upon my own health, had not my dear mother been at my side, always ready to assist me; had there not been the safety-valve of the nursery and my boys to distract my thoughts, now and then, from the one depressing influence. There was the hope, too, of Keldon’s return, and the belief that he had already started on his journey.

His last letter had spoken of the completion of his work, of the little time that would elapse before he cleared up accounts

with his employers, made his *congé* and received his passport. I had not heard from him for a month; my last letter remained unanswered, and I was trying to fancy it lying dusty and unopened in some Russian dead-letter office, and George—my own dear George—farther and farther away from it every day. With hope in my children, my husband, and the bright days in store for us, I could realize the horror of Andrew's position, for he would believe in nothing better or more consolatory than his present lot. To speak to him of my happiness a few years hence, and to trust that he would live to share it with me, was but to pain him more.

In the afternoon, I had relieved my mother from her attendance on Andrew; seen that mother, who was not so strong as she used to be, safely deposited on my bed in the next room, and found some books for my father to peruse or doze over in the front-parlour.

Andrew was not disposed for conversation that afternoon, and I did not seek

to disturb him, feeling certain that he had yet to recover from the effects of last night's confession. Andrew was, however, more inclined to drop off into little restless sleeps, and to wander in them and talk about the times beyond recall. These dreamy and disturbed snatches at repose were the natural sequence to the stupor that had preceded them, and therefore gave no cause for alarm. All was as it had been for many long days and nights, since the world would have nothing to do with Andrew's faulty opera.

I had dropped my needle-work in my lap, and was reading for about the seventy-seventh time my husband's letter—what a silly, shrewd, half-clever, half-comical, and all affectionate letter it was!—when my father's white head looked round the door.

I crossed the room silently.

"What is it, father?"

"A lady wants to see you, lass. She wouldn't give her name—a pale-faced, handsome lady, with fair ha—"

"*Hush!*"

But Andrew was in dream-land; at the race-course, I think, making his bets on the Favourite, and backing her against the Field; the voice of his father had not aroused him. Placing my father on guard, for it was never safe to leave Andrew alone, I went down stairs to the parlour with a beating heart. I knew who was waiting my approach before I had entered the room, and found Alice Tresdaile standing there.

She was very pale—there was a restless heart beneath the hand which pressed upon it.

“You see—I am here.”

“Oh! Alice, for what reason?”

“God knows—I don’t. I am not myself—I am ill, mad. Feel how my hand burns and my pulse throbs!” she cried; “how is he?”

“About the same.”

“Did he not think me very hard and cruel to deny him, in his dying hours, one sight of me?”

“No, Alice,” I replied; “he thought you had acted for the best.”

"Ernest has told me what your brother related to him last night," said Alice; "it is a strange, bewildering confession, but it does not prove him wholly bad! He has not injured me so much; his life was a struggle, not one deliberate scheme, Barbara—he loved me through it all!"

"No matter, now."

"I have been unjust towards him," murmured Alice; "when I turned away heart-sick—heart-broken—at the dupe and play-thing he had made me, I would not grant him one charitable thought, or give him credit for one word of simple truth, during the long term of our engagement. As I put in him all an innocent girl's trust, so there followed a disbelief and hate of him equally extravagant. It has been my nature, Barbara, to fly always to extremes—you know that by experience."

"I would not have come to-day, Alice."

"Why not?" she asked, almost defiantly.

"He is content with your forgiveness; he is weakened, I fear, by the result of last night's interview with your brother—under

any circumstances, you must not see him Alice."

I said it firmly, and Alice seemed to flinch.

"I have come to see him," she pleaded, gently; "his misery, his despair is on my conscience. Barbara," she cried, vehemently, "I must see him, now!"

"No."

"Not to speak to him," she said; "not to let him know that I am near him, in fulfilment of his wish—just to see him and begone."

I suppose my relentless expression of visage began to soften, for Alice's arguments became more forcible.

"He may say to-morrow, or the next day, 'I should have been sure of her forgiveness, had she only come to see me,' and you can tell him, then, that I have been! If he lov—if he remember me with any kindness, it will be a comfort to him."

"Is your brother Ernest aware of this step?"

"Yes."

"And Miss Hollingston—that is, your brother's wife?"

"She has seconded my wish."

"Come with me, then—he may be still asleep."

Alice followed me upstairs, stood waiting on the landing-place for my return. Andrew was sleeping yet, and wandering in his sleep; he had left the race-course for the bay of St. Brelade, and was on the deep white sands a boy again, floating his toy-ship on the waters that rolled to his feet. In the chair occupied last night by Ernest Tresdaile sat my father, his white head bowed, his large veined hands shaking as they were held before his face. It was the heaviest of trials to hear the pride of his heart, his first-born, his only boy, whispering like that!

"Barbara," he sobbed forth as I entered, "do you hear him?—he is talking of St. Brelade—when he was a boy there!"

"Yes, yes—I hear."

"Is it not a bad sign when the mind goes back so far as that?" he asked, eagerly.

"I have never heard so."

"Oh! it is—it is!"

"Father, will you leave me?—there is a young lady outside wishes to see him for a moment."

"A young lady—the young lady who called just now?"

"Yes."

"What right has she—"

He stopped, then came close to my side and whispered—

"Was she to have been my poor boy's wife?"

"Once."

"Ah! once. There has been a quarrel then, and she was in the wrong, of course. How the heart softens in an hour like this! She wishes to see him?"

"Yes."

"Andrew is not to know it?"

"Not till I choose my time for telling him—it is a secret at present."

"Poor Andrew—poor girl!"

He went out of the room, bowed very low to her who had been honoured by his

Andrew's love, opened wide the door to admit her.

Alice passed him, the door closed softly, and left her alone with me and the old love.

Yes, there he was, the old sweetheart, the first love! He who had charmed her with his love story when she was yet but a girl; who was to have married her and shared his life with hers; who had deceived her, and worn the mask; plotted against her, and yet loved her! Was it not all for the best that it had ended thus; that the tie had been rudely severed, and there was nothing for which the fair girl, standing there and gazing so wistfully at the sleeper, had to mourn? No rending of the heart in which the image had been enshrined, now—it was all over! Neither wife, nor betrothed, to wrestle with grief at the bedside, with the hand of the loved one in hers—for her none of the sorrow that eats into the heart, and works slowly its way to the depths!

Alice was pained; she drew with a hasty hand the veil before her face.

"How changed he is," she whispered.

"Not to me," I replied; "for the last year he has not looked much better than that."

"What is he murmuring about?"

"About very old times—when he was a boy."

"Oh, to begin from the boy again with firmer will and stouter heart!"

"Oh, to change the unalterable," I added —"and to find in the change the same ignorance in life of what is just, what is best!"

"Right," answered Alice, "you reprove me—I deserve it."

"Andrew moved his hand outside the coverlet, and Alice started back, ready to shrink behind the curtains. But his eyes remained closed, and he was still watching his ship breasting the waves in the bay.

Alice drew her glove off, and laid her own white hand gently, timidly on his.

"The little there is to forgive, I forgive with all my heart. If it be God's will that we should never meet again, His mercy on you, Andrew! So—good-bye!"

Did the touch of that soft hand strike on the hidden chords, not loud enough to wake the sleeper, but to rouse as by some charm the old thoughts, and sweep away as if by magic the boyish retrospect?

"Alice—my Alice!"

His Alice only in his dreams, wherein was alone happiness and hope for him! Not the Alice beside me, but the bright-faced girl who had loved him, struggled for him, and defended him till his own unworthiness had turned her from him!

Alice had gone — the room contained her not. I found her trembling on the landing.

"I am going now, Barbara," she said, with quivering lips.

"It is best."

"Is he awake?"

"No."

"Good-bye. I shall be glad to get home, to think, to cry, to do something that will stir the ice in my veins. Let him know I have been here before the *last*!"

She hastened down stairs and I returned

to the room. Everything seemed to happen strangely, and for the worst now—Andrew was awake, the face was flushed, the eyes bright and flashing, the voice with which he greeted me deep and thrilling.

“Barbara, who has been here?”

“N—no—one,” I faltered forth.

He held her glove in his trembling hand; he was not to be deceived—to deceive him at that time was to kill him!

“Say Alice has been here to see me, for God’s sake!”

“She has,” I answered; “but be calm, dear.”

“I am calm, now,” he cried, burying his face in the bed-clothes and sobbing like a child; “I can die now—God bless her, God bless her!”

CHAPTER VIII.

A VISITOR.

ANDREW'S excitement did not seriously affect him; with the exception of his pulse beating more irregularly the remainder of the day, he was, in an hour afterwards, outwardly calm and resigned. He was more gentle too in his manner, more tractable, less callous. For the first time during his illness, he let me read a chapter of the New Testament to him—a chapter full of hope and consolation to those who had sinned before God and repented.

After that night there lay before me a new hope, and if it were not of this world,

still it lightened my heart and gave me comfort. All the next week the new hope lived with me, though Alice called not again, and only Ernest's page came once a day with Mr. Tresdaile's compliments, and how was Mr. Bloyce? All the next week, as all the last and week preceding, lying there in the room upstairs; one day a little weaker, the next stronger; flickering between life and death, resigned to leave the world, and at peace with those within it.

Barnaby Tresdaile came several times to inquire about Andrew also; the last visit going up to see him, and being asked very quietly but kindly not to call again.

"It pleases me to know there are some in the world interested in me yet," explained Andrew; "but—but you are so like your cousin Bartholomew!"

"You are right, Mr. Bloyce," responded Barnaby; "I have been always considered like that gentleman, and I'm not proud of the resemblance. Heaven and earth! to think there was no other copy for me in the world of Nature—Nature who abhors

duplicates, too—but that swindling relation of mine!”

Barnaby did not express himself indig-
nantly; his easy manner, his pleasant little
laugh, took away any appearance of animosity.
Barnaby had lost his money, was quite reconciled to his new position, and had almost forgotten the cause that had reduced him so low. I believe had Bartholomew Tresdaile entered the room at that moment, his cousin's first impulse would have been to extend his hand, and cry, “Ah! Bartholomew, my dear fellow, how are you?—how well you *are* looking after your country trip, to be sure!”

And had he really returned, some such greeting the polite world would have accorded to him. Everybody had his suspicions, but no one had anything to bring against Bartholomew Tresdaile, Esquire.

A considerable amount of money had been missed from the funds of the Virginian Tobacco Association, but there it was down in the books, drawn by some one whom nobody knew, or claimed as a debt for

goods which nobody had happened to see. Bartholomew had left town rather hurriedly, but what was that to do with it? Barnaby had not loudly complained, for the sake of the family; the deserted wife and children were also silent, and were, thanks to Alice Tresdaile, not in destitute circumstances. Bartholomew, in the eyes of the law, was a gentleman still, for the law had not taken any trouble concerning him. Only Barnaby could have made a clear case against him, and Barnaby had pocketed his losses and said little; whilst Bartholomew, not knowing how far to trust the clemency of his cousin, was still holding aloof from the white cliffs of Albion—"was probably," Barnaby said, "doing very well in America, which was just the place for a persevering fellow like Bart. to double his capital in. By Jove! what a capital nigger-driver he would make in the Old Dominion!"

Barnaby was inclined to be a gossip when occasion offered, and I was not sorry to get him from the sick room to the par-

lour, and quarter him in an arm-chair by the fireside with father for company. The Jersey farmer and the London speculator agreed very well together; my father had a great respect for a Londoner, and Bartholomew sipped his grog and related such stories of his wonderful shrewdness, as left my parent in amazement for weeks afterwards—his plans were all so deep, and they had all turned out so unfortunately!

Mother and I spent the evening with Andrew; he was not in a talkative mood, I remember, but inclined to lie and think,—“listen,” he called it, “to our domestic chat about ways and means.” We were destined to have further visitors that night, for the servant came up to inform me that Mr. Ernest Tresdaile was below, and wished to see me for a moment. Andrew had fallen into too deep a train of thought to pay any attention to the summons; there was nothing to keep him on the alert now—Ernest and Alice had been to see him, the past had been forgiven, and he was preparing for the future! I was glad however,

that he had not heard the name of Ernest Tresdaile mentioned; it might have suggested to him, as it had to me—illness at Stamford Street.

Leaving my mother in the room, I descended to the parlour, where I found Mr. Ernest Tresdaile seated at the table, busily engaged in "mixing for himself."

"Is Alice ill?" was my first inquiry.

"Poorly—poorly," was Ernest's reply; "her mad-headed expedition hasn't turned out very well for her. I told her what it would be, but even Mrs. Ernest Tresdaile took the field against me."

"Is she—"

"Only a little thoughtful — all right enough, of course. Here's your very good health, Mrs. Keldon."

When he put the glass down, he drew a letter from his pocket, and surveyed me attentively through his spectacles.

"I hope you are prepared to hear a little good news, by way of a change, Mrs. Keldon?"

"Oh! sir—yes!" I exclaimed, feeling

my heart bump suddenly in my bosom, as if it wanted to get out.

"Can you guess from whom this comes?" holding up the letter.

"From George?"

"Exactly so."

"Will you give me—the—letter—if you please?" I asked, trying hard to keep from choking.

"Don't be in a hurry—this letter's my property, Mrs. Keldon."

"Oh, indeed!"

"Mr. Keldon telegraphs to me from Folkestone, bidding me come hither at once and prepare you for his arrival. Now, don't begin to turn pale, or I shall think I have done my part badly, and George will punch my head because you are not prepared at all. He's a terrible fellow when his blood's up, and I'm such a little chap, I shall get smashed in no time!"

He did his best to make me smile, to treat George's arrival in England as a matter of course; but it was no common

event to me—my heart was welling over, the long looked-for, prayed-for hour was at hand!

“I am prepared—that is, I shall be in a minute or two. I have been expecting him, but it is a great shock of joy to me, and I am not ready yet—not yet grateful enough to Him who has brought my husband back to me.”

“Try the brandy and water, ma’am,” suggested Barnaby, as I sat down, and leaned my shaking elbows on the table.

“No, thank you—I am prepared now.”

“Quite prepared?” asked Ernest.

“Yes.”

“Then he’s outside in the passage!” cried Ernest; “come in, you old Russian, do!”

And in he rushed at the signal, took me in his arms, and smothered me with kisses! It must have been five minutes before I saw him through my joyful tears—before I looked up at that nice little head of his, and saw his sparkling eyes bent on me. He had grown very fierce, too, outwardly, and had taken to a chestnut

beard and a moustache of a true Muscovite cut. I was uncertain if he had not turned extravagant also, for there was a diamond pin in his stock, the size of which made me shudder with presentiment.

George Keldon did not find his voice in a hurry; it was not till he had shaken hands with Barnaby and my father, and was seated close to my side—not till he had given one tremendous cough to clear his voice, that he came out, like the clown in a pantomime, with—

“Well—here we are!”

I was about to speak, when he gave his usual injunction of silence.

“Hold hard, my girl! Take your time, and don’t put on the steam with the safety valve not in acting order. Just sit still, and keep your little mouth shut till I say ‘Off!’ I’m used to giving orders now, and if you don’t obey them, you’ll come to grief. There’s a knout upstairs in my portmanteau, Barbara.”

“B—b—but—”

“Barbara, don’t make a weeping willow

of yourself before company," he said; "if you will only listen to your lord and husband's conversation with these good gentlemen, and cork the sentimental down, we shall soon be Darby and Joan again."

He turned to my father.

"So poor Andrew's overboard again; we musn't despair, old gentleman," he said, cheerfully, "or think we shan't have him on his legs again. He's a young man, remember."

"Ay, ay, you're very kind, George—it's like you to shew us the best side."

"What a deal of good your voice does a fellow," said Barnaby, on whom my husband's appearance, or the brandy and water, had exercised an extraordinary effect. "I have been a cup too low myself for the last six months, and I feel now as if I had stepped into the sunshine. Keep up the brightening process, my worthy friend."

"*You* have been unfortunate, cousin Barnaby?"

"I don't want to discuss the matter to-

night," replied Barnaby, with a wave of his hand.

"But I do," said Keldon, "just for five minutes, till my good lady here has got over the St. Vitus."

"Let her try the—"

"Let her be," growled my husband, as he passed his arm round me, and drew me still trembling to his side, "and go on with the subject. You have been unfortunate, Barnaby," he repeated.

"I have, sir."

"If you can give up the excitement of public companies, or first submit your plans and speculations to me or Ernest here, you may do well yet."

"Well with what, George?"

"Eight thousand pounds."

Barnaby put down the fourth tumbler of brandy and water he was raising to his lips, and looked hard at Keldon.

"What the devil do you mean?"

"That with eight thousand pounds you can do very well, if you are careful."

"My poor Keldon," said Barnaby, sym-

pathetically, "the cold weather in St. Petersburg, or the cares of business, have seriously affected your head."

"Upon my soul, I don't see what you are driving at myself," said Ernest; "is it a joke?"

"No," answered Keldon, "far from it. It's a serious subject, which I can't dwell upon at any length to-night—might not have mentioned at all, only Mrs. Keldon requires something to divert her attention. The fact is, there has been left me eight thousand pounds in trust for Barnaby Tresdaile, Esq."

"Mad as a March hare!" commented Barnaby; "dear, dear, dear, what a wreck of a clever brain!"

"Bequeathed," added Keldon, gravely, "by Bartholomew Tresdaile, who died at St. Petersburg seven days before I left."

"God bless me—poor Bart.!" exclaimed Barnaby.

"I met him at St. Petersburg a few months since," explained Keldon; "he was very ill then; the Russian climate had nipped

him in two. He was so ill at that time, that he was even glad to see *me* and ask my advice about doctors and so forth. He was in his bed a week after that, lingered on and never rallied again. When he knew it was all up, he made a clean breast of what had brought him to Russia, confessed that his life had not been the best or most honest—but as he's gone, we need not dwell on *that*. You know what brought him to St. Petersburg as well—perhaps better—than I. Most people in his circumstances prefer America or Australia—he thought the North of Europe would do better for him, and it did for him entirely!”

“And the rest of his money?” asked Ernest.

“Left to his wife and children, with the exception of two thousand pounds conscience-money towards the expenses of the Virginian Tobacco Association, and fifteen hundred pounds to Andrew Bloyce, Esq.—conscience-money, too.”

“Are you left sole executor?” asked Ernest.

"Yes."

"I wish you joy of your trouble."

"I don't mind the trouble of fulfilling a poor fellow's last wishes," replied my husband, "especially as he died very sorry for all the evil he had caused, or been the means of causing in his life. He asked everybody's forgiveness very heartily at the last—Bart. Tresdaile once floored, wasn't the Bart. Tresdaile, Barnaby or you have known."

"He was a shrewd fellow," said Barnaby; "had he only been a shade more honest, what money he might have made. He was a true Tresdaile—sharp as a needle. Heavens! what a company we might have started two years ago, Bart., Ernest, Keldon and I for Directors—the whole strength of the family 'cuteness concentrated to one given point."

"Steady, Barnaby," said Keldon; "don't let your blood warm towards a company again. Drop the commercial, and be quiet."

"Well," with a sigh, "perhaps I had better drop it; 'but remember," he cried

warmly, as a bright thought occurred to him, "if anything should turn up in the way of discovery—you're always thinking, you know!—it may be worth making a Company of, and I'll join you to the last farthing."

"Thankee, Barnaby, for your confidence; and now if you will go home, I shall feel grateful."

"Certainly, my dear Keldon," said the obliging Barnaby, rising at the hint.

"You will excuse my rudeness," said Keldon, "but I have not got rid of my habit of speaking out, and I think my little wife is too tired and flurried for company, and would rather see both of you to-morrow—I'm sure I would!" he muttered, in a sly aside to me.

His cousins were gone at last—even my father had bidden us good night, and retired to his lodgings. I had my George all to myself, could rest my head upon his broad chest, and hear his story of how the world was offering him its honours, and how his love—dearer than all the world to

me—had kept him persevering, hopeful, till this day.

It was a great happiness to have him by my side again, and I was thankful for it. It lightened my heart; it strengthened me in many tasks that lay before me—only my poor Andrew lying ill upstairs, shadowed my rejoicing.

Keldon went to see his sick brother-in-law at a later hour—after the nursery had been visited, and the children kissed wide awake, and frightened by the “foreigner!”

As we stood outside the door of the sick room, he said :—

“I did not enter into the details of Bart. Tresdaile’s Will before my cousin Ernest—it would have revived a painful subject, which with care may rest for ever. You remember Mrs. Tresdaile’s Will?”

“Yes.”

“And the clause therein bequeathing Alice’s money to Bart., or his successors and assigns, in the event of Alice marrying your brother. I reminded Bart. of that when he was having his Will prepared. I

did not believe it even just possible that any chain of events could bring the old sweethearts together, but I thought that he might as well will away the reversion, to prevent all accidents; and life is full of accidents, or I shouldn't be growing up a gentleman."

"Well?"

"So Bart., as eager to be just as he was once to—never mind, he's dead!" hastily added he—"so Bart. left his reversion to Mrs. Andrew Bloyce, strictly settled the property on herself, and added his blessing into the bargain."

"Shall you speak of this to Andrew?"

"To nobody. Whoever is curious about Bart. Tresdaile's Will, and wants to see the original document, must go to Doctor's Commons—and be well up in Russian, too, to understand it."

We passed into the room, where my mother embraced Keldon, and the brothers-in-law shook hands together.

"I'm glad you are back, Keldon," said Andrew, with a faint smile.

"And I'm sorry to see you so low as this, Bloyce," responded Keldon; "although it will be all the more credit for me to astonish the doctors, and invent something to cure you."

"I shouldn't thank you for the invention, Keldon."

"The deuce you wouldn't!"

"I am at peace with the world, and the world offers no temptations to stay in it. My one regret is, that I shall leave it in debt."

Keldon looked at me, and I nodded. My husband told him briefly of the death of Bartholomew Tresdaile, and the fifteen hundred pounds bequeathed him.

"I can repay you the old loan," he said.

"I won't take it," answered Keldon; "the loan must stand over, and the money must lay the foundation of—"

"Peace, Keldon!" exclaimed Andrew; "the house is a ruin—you pain me!"

Poor Andrew shut out the one faint chance for me which the doctor had spoken

of — he would have nothing to hope for
in that world on which his hold was so
weak!

CHAPTER IX.

THE CURTAIN DROPS.

ALICE TRESDAILE called the next day to welcome Keldon back to England. Whether other feelings, strange and unacknowledged even to herself, brought her to Kingsland Road, it is certain that she lingered long after all friendly greetings had been exchanged, and Keldon, having exhausted the subject, had retired.

Alice was not well—her face was pale, and marked with many an anxious line; and there was an irritability and an impatience in her manner that reminded me more of the old Alice than the new.

She had not mentioned Andrew's name in my husband's presence; it was not till he had retired that she turned quickly to me.

"How is he?"

"My brother?"

"Yes."

"No stronger—perhaps a little weaker."

"Did you tell him that—that I called?"

"Yes."

"I hope it did not disturb him too much?"

"No; on the contrary, he has been more gentle in his ways, more obedient to my wishes. Your visit, Alice, has made him happier, I think."

"And he might have died, Barbara, believing that I was hard and unforgiving. Oh! how young he is to die. Tell me every word that the physician has said to you?" she asked, eagerly.

I told her. I spoke of the one faint chance there yet might be for Andrew, if he could be taught to long for life, to hope

in it. She listened, almost breathlessly; the colour came and went, and the bosom wildly heaved.

"Barbara," she said; "it may be in my power to give him a hope which lies beyond your's—a hope that may come to nothing, but which yet may save him."

"A hope that may come to nothing," I repeated.

"Its fulfilment will depend upon himself," she answered, blushing; "not on me. Barbara, this is no moment to be reserved—his life is in great danger, and I may show my heart a little. I have not forgotten him—he was my first love, he will be my last. Let him some day be earnest, persevering, faithful, and I care not how poor he is—I will share his poverty with his love! And he always loved me, Barbara—you know that now!"

"Alice, it is too late."

"Oh! no, no, don't say that!"

"He will always be a delicate man, and his health remain a life-long care."

"But I can make him happy, I am sure

of it—and who would care for him in sickness like me! Barbara, he must not die, if I can save him."

"Where are you going?"

"To his room—don't hold my hand," she cried; "your efforts have not drawn him back from the brink, you must not refuse mine."

"Well, let me prepare him for your coming, and—" I added—"let me urge you to say but little, for his own sake."

"You may trust me."

I left her struggling with herself; I entered Andrew's room, dismissed my mother from her watch, and sat down by Andrew's bedside.

"Andrew, do you feel any stronger to-day?"

"No, dear, about the same."

"Do you feel strong enough to see an old friend—a friend you loved once—may love still?"

"Yes."

"Strong enough to see Alice Tresdaile?"

The slightest change of colour, as he answered "Yes," a second time.

"She is down stairs waiting."

"It is very kind of her—it is more than kind !"

* * * * *

A wasted figure in the bed ; a fair-haired, blue-eyed girl shrinking, as it were, in the shadow of the curtain. So strange a meeting after so strange a parting, the memory of which was burning at the brains of each !

"Miss Tresdaile."

"Mr. Bloyce."

"I know not how to find words to thank you for this kindness—for all that past kindness which has taken a load from my heart."

"Do not speak of it."

"I have not strength to speak of it. Will you believe that I will think of it till the last—I may be believed *now*, Alice !"

Alice moved her head, she did not trust herself to speak.

"Are you offended that I call you Alice?" he said, after a long silence.

"No; it is like the old times, *Andrew*."

"Ah!" with a bitter sigh—"the old times!"

Alice looked towards me; my warning look assured her that the interview must not be prolonged—that if she had the will to bid my brother live and hope, but little time remained to tell him so.

"Have you anything to say to me, before I go?" she faltered forth.

"God bless you!"

"Nothing more?"

"Good-bye!" he murmured; "may I touch your hand a moment?"

She placed her hand within his own, and the sick man's fingers closed upon it.

"I did not expect to find this hand in mine again. When it is some day given as a pledge of faith and love in one more worthy than myself, thank God for your escape. I am grateful for it now; there is no greater consolation for me, lying here."

"You loved me!" whispered Alice.

"It is no excuse for the past."

"It is to me!"

Andrew started, but he could not believe she had come with hope to him—a ministering angel! A pause, then Alice said—

"I will bid you good-bye, now."

"For ever!"

"Not for ever, Andrew. The doctors say that with one hope before you, you may yet be saved."

"And what hope is there left for a wretch like me, Miss Tresdaile?"

The voice was very low that answered him:—

"The hope in a new life and an honourable position therein. Three years from this date may see you persevering, honest, industrious, working onwards surely to a name; not dismayed by disappointment, but learning therefrom to struggle upwards, trusting in yourself, losing no faith in God. Such a man I believed you once—such a

man I will three years hence believe in once again. Good-bye!"

"Stay, Alice!"

But she had gone, and Hope was left within the sick chamber, and the radiance of its presence seemed to rest upon my brother's face.

Andrew recovered. Not suddenly, but slowly, irregularly—now retrieving some fragments of his wasted strength, then sinking back, but clinging still to the hope left him by his Alice. The world moved on—days, months stole by; Hope struggled against Disease, and brought the colour to my brother's cheek and the light back to his eyes. He was at St. Brelade at last, resting on the deep sands, and watching the play of the waves, as he had watched it in his fever dreams. From that time to this—three years this coming spring—he has known, God be thanked, no relapse. He is not strong, possibly will never be the hale man again, but the three years have not seen him fall back to the old weakness

of body, and have rescued him—I think for ever—from that more fatal weakness, a relapse to which is death.

And Alice waits for him. They do not meet, they do not correspond; each has patience to wait, courage to endure, faith to believe. Month after month lessening the time between them, adds to their hopes, brings the Day nearer when one who has erred and repented can remind the other—trusting as pure, earnest love *can* trust!—of the whispered hope that brought him back to life.

May he and Alice live to be as happy as my George and I! I wish them no greater blessing in a world of hopes and fears. They can but be happy; and so far as happiness is the portion of the children of earth, we have it and are grateful. Such troubles as we all experience in our pilgrimage have fallen naturally to our share, taken one little baby face away from us, taught us love is not idolatry.

But with prosperity before me, with a good husband at my side—the world which

has called him clever and made him famous does not know how good he is!—and with loving children clustering round my knees, it is not hard to feel content.

THE END.

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